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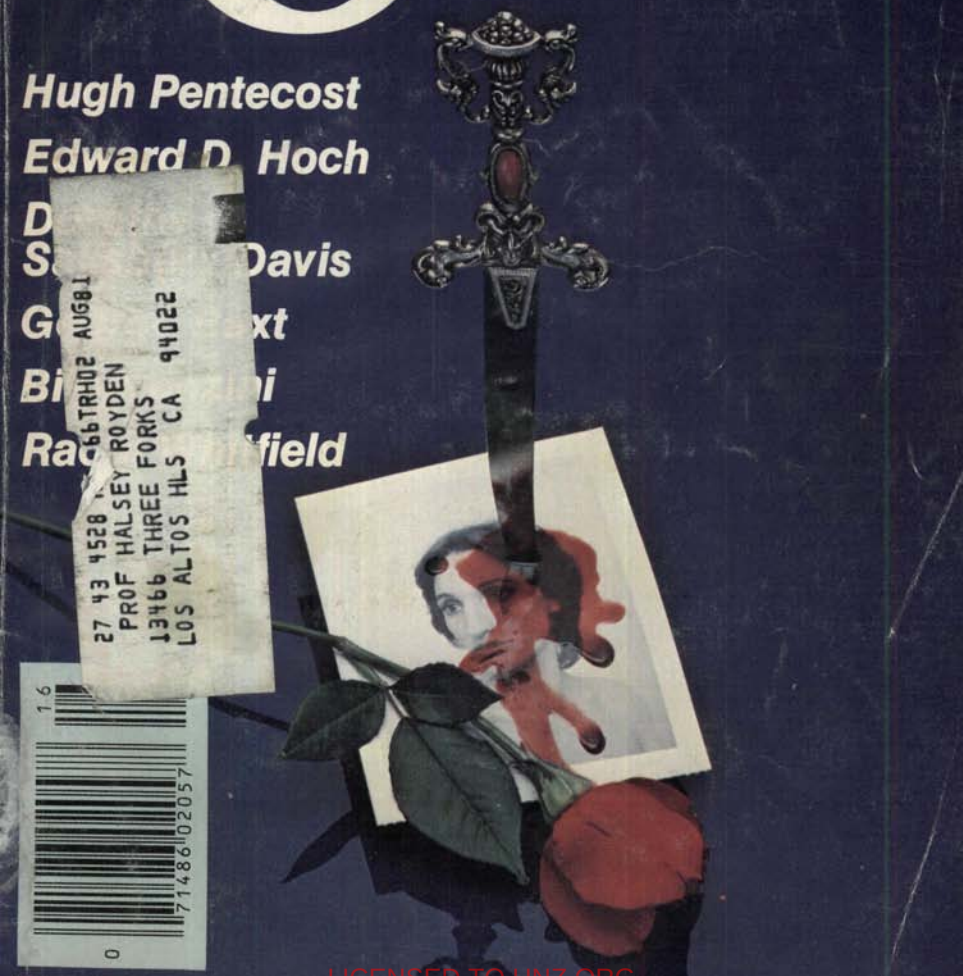

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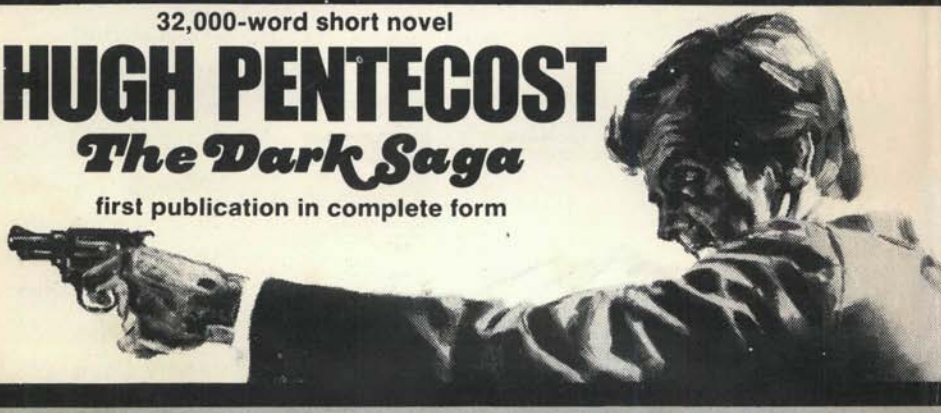

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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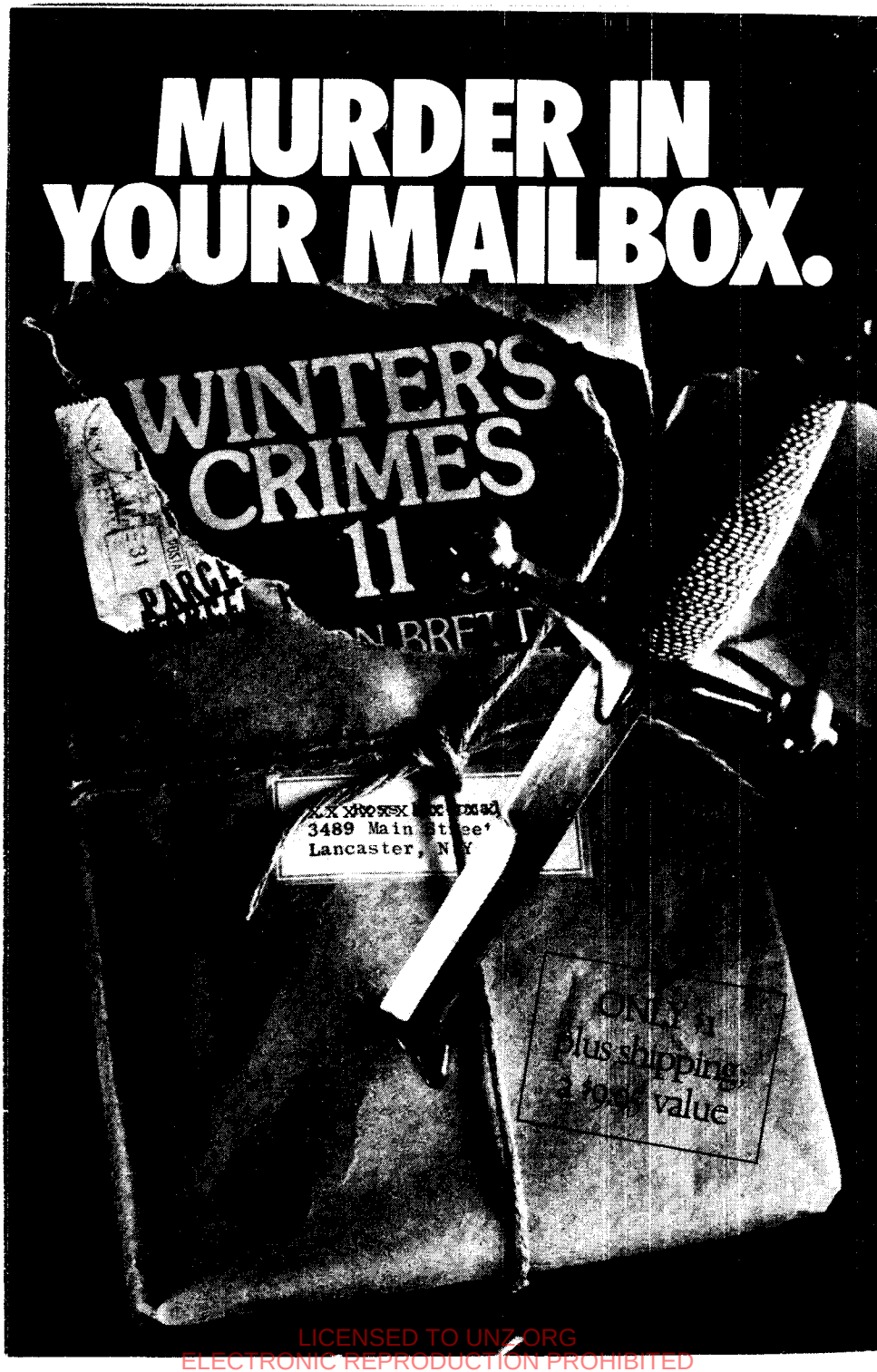

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a *NEW* detective short-short by

BILL PRONZINI

"Because a man named Harding committed murder in a locked room this morning and I can't prove it . . ."

THE TERRARIUM PRINCIPLE

by BILL PRONZINI

Andrea Parker was on the back porch, working on her latest project—the planting of seeds in a bottle terrarium—when she heard Jerry's car in the driveway. She took off her gloves, brushed flecks of potting soil off her gardening shirt, and went into the kitchen to meet him as he opened the garage door.

There was a preoccupied scowl on Jerry's face. He looked rumpled, the way Columbo used to look on television. Which was unusual; her husband may have been a police lieutenant attached to the Homicide Division, but he definitely was not the Peter Falk type.

He brushed his lips over hers—not much of a kiss, Andrea thought—and said, "I could use a drink." He went straight to the refrigerator and began tugging out one of the ice trays.

"Rough day?" she asked him.

"You can say that again. Except that the operative word is frustrating. One of the most frustrating days I've ever spent."

"Why?"

"Because a man named Harding committed murder in a locked room this morning and I can't prove it. *That's* why."

"Want to talk about it?"

He made a face. But he said, "I might as well. It's going to be on my mind all evening anyway. You can help me brood."

Andrea took the ice tray away from him, shooed him into the living room, and made drinks for both of them. When she brought

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them in, Jerry was sitting on the couch with his legs crossed, elbow resting on one knee and chin cupped in his palm. He really did look like Columbo tonight. All he needed, she thought, was a trench coat and a cigar.

She handed him his drink and sat down beside him. "So why can't you prove this man Harding committed murder? You did say it happened in a locked room, didn't you?"

"Well, more or less locked. And I can't prove it because we can't find the gun. Without it we just don't have a case."

"What exactly happened?"

"It's a pretty simple story, except for the missing gun. The classic kind of simple, I mean. Harding's uncle, Philip Granger, has—or had—a house out in Roehampton Estates; wealthy guy, made a lot of money in oil stocks over the years. Harding, on the other hand, is your typical black-sheep nephew—drinks too much, can't hold down a job, has a penchant for fast women and slow horses.

"This morning Harding went out to his uncle's house to see him. The housekeeper let him in. According to her, Harding seemed upset about something, angry. Granger's lawyer, Martin Sampson, happened to be there at the time, preparing some papers for Granger to sign, and he confirms the housekeeper's impression that Harding was upset.

"So Harding went into his uncle's study and either he or Granger locked the door. Fifteen minutes later both Sampson and the housekeeper heard a gunshot. They were sure it came from the study; they both ran straight for that door. But the door was locked, as I said. They pounded on it and shouted, and inside Harding yelled back that somebody had shot his uncle. Only he didn't open the door right away. It took him eight and one-half minutes by Sampson's watch to get around to it."

"Eight and a half minutes?" Andrea said. "What did he say he was doing all that time?"

"Looking out the window, first of all, for some sign of a phantom killer. Harding's claim is that the window was open and Granger was shot through the window from outside; he says Sampson and the housekeeper must have been mistaken about where the shot came from. The rest of the time he was supposedly ministering to his uncle and didn't stop to open the door until the old man had died."

"But you think he spent that time hiding the gun somewhere in the room?"

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"I *know* that's what he was doing," Jerry said. "His story is implausible and he'd had arguments with his uncle before, always over money and sometimes to the point of violence. He's guilty as sin—I'm sure of it!"

"Couldn't he have just thrown the gun out the window?"

"No. We searched the grounds; we'd have found the gun if it had been out there."

"Well, maybe he climbed out the window, took it away somewhere, and hid it."

"No chance," Jerry said. "Remember the rain we had last night? There's a flower bed outside the study window and the ground there was muddy from the rain; nobody could have walked through it without leaving footprints. And it's too wide to jump over from the window sill. No, the gun is in that room. He managed to hide it somewhere during those eight and one-half minutes. His uncle's stereo unit was playing, fairly loud, and if he made any noise the music covered it—Sampson and the housekeeper didn't hear anything unusual."

"Didn't one of them go outdoors to look in through the study window?"

"Sampson did, yes. But Harding had drawn the drapes. In case the phantom killer came back, he said."

"What's the study like?" Andrea asked.

"Big room with a heavy masculine motif: hunting prints, a stag's head, a wall full of books, overstuffed leather furniture, a walk-in fireplace—"

"I guess you looked up the fireplace chimney," Andrea said.

He gave her a wry smile. "First thing. Nothing but soot."

"What else was in the room?"

"A desk that we went over from top to bottom. And model airplanes, a clipper ship-in-a-bottle, a miniature train layout—all kinds of model stuff scattered around."

"Oh?"

"Evidently Granger built models in his spare time, as a hobby. There was also a small workbench along one wall."

"I see."

"The only other thing in there was the stereo unit—radio, record player, tape deck. I thought Harding might have hidden the gun inside one of the speakers, but no soap."

Andrea was sitting very still, pondering. So still that Jerry frowned at her and then said, "What's the matter?"

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"I just had an idea. Tell me, was there any strong glue on the workbench?"

"Glue?"

"Yes. The kind where you only need a few drops to make a bond and it dries instantly."

"I guess there was, sure. Why?"

"How about a glass cutter?"

"I suppose so. Andrea, what are you getting at?"

"I think I know what Harding was doing for those eight and a half minutes," she said. "And I think I know just where he hid the gun."

Jerry sat up straight. "Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious. Come on, I want to show you something." She led him out through the kitchen, onto the rear porch. "See that terrarium?"

"What about it?"

"Well, it's a big glass jar with a small opening at one end, right? Like a bottle. There's nothing in it now except soil and seeds, but pretty soon there'll be flowers and plants growing inside and people who don't know anything about terrariums will look at it and say, 'Now how in the world did you get those plants through that little opening?' It doesn't occur to them that you *didn't* put plants in there; you put seeds and they grew into plants."

"I don't see what that has to do with Harding—"

"But there's also a way to build a bottle terrarium using full-grown plants," she went on, "that almost never occurs to anybody. All you have to do is slice off the bottom of the container with a glass cutter; then, when you've finished making your garden arrangement inside, you just glue the bottom back on. That's what some professional florists do. You can also heat the glass afterward, to smooth out the line so nobody can tell it's been cut, but that isn't really necessary. Hardly anyone looks that close."

A light was beginning to dawn in Jerry's eyes. "Like we didn't look close enough at a certain item in Granger's study."

"The ship-in-the-bottle," Andrea said, nodding. "I'll bet you that's where Harding put the gun—inside the ship that's inside the bottle."

"No bet," Jerry said. "If you're right, I'll buy you the fanciest steak dinner in town."

He hurried inside, no longer looking like Columbo, and telephoned police headquarters. When he was through talking he told Andrea that they would have word within an hour. And they did—exactly

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fifty-six minutes had passed when the telephone rang. Jerry took it, listened, then grinned.

"You were right," he said when he'd hung up. "The bottom of the bottle had been cut and glued back, the ship inside had been hollowed out, and the missing gun was inside the ship. We overlooked it because we automatically assumed nobody could put a gun through a bottle neck that small. It never occurred to us that Harding didn't *have* to put it through the neck to get it inside."

Andrea smiled. "The terrarium principle," she said.

"I guess that's a pretty good name for it. Come on, get your coat; we'll go have that steak dinner right now."

"With champagne, maybe?"

"Sweetheart," he said, "with a whole magnum."

DETECTIVERSE

CAR-FREE

by M. EDWARD HOLDEN

The stickup went well
But he hadn't run far,
  When he suddenly stopped with a groan.

The curb by the bank
Was devoid of his car—
  He'd parked in a Tow Away Zone!

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When Eleanor Sullivan, our Managing Editor, finished reading this story in typescript, she wrote this comment: "Fascinating. A wonderful, subtle kind of Gothic, the best I've read since REBECCA." *Yes, it could be called a kind of contemporary, sophisticated Gothic—a cottage in Connecticut can be as fraught with danger as a ruinous castle near the English Fens . . .*

A POCKET OF COLD

by JANET HOLM

When Laura Milland's tenants moved out of the two-family cottage on Hollow Road at the end of February, her friends began to worry at once about her living there alone.

Even this part of Connecticut had its share of random violence. Laura was a working writer, oblivious of her immediate surroundings for long periods at a stretch. At 38 she was singularly attractive—dark-haired and gray-eyed. There were men who added up physical appearance and the solitary state and came to the conclusion that here was an invitation, or a challenge, or both.

The cottage had neighbors within what might be called screaming distance—on one side a couple who worked, on the other a retired pair who took frequent and extended trips in their camper. Across the road and long claimed by trees was an empty shell of stone, only its chimney a reminder of human habitation.

Laura did not want to advertise for new tenants to take the place of the ones who had been there for almost a year; she was too aware of her inability to turn down whatever undesirables might come her way. Her friends kept an eye out for suitable people and meanwhile made fun, if concerned fun, of her ineptitude with the weapons they had pressed on her.

Of the Mace—glancing up from her typewriter to see an assailant in the doorway and then reaching for her huge disorderly handbag, "Wait a minute, I've got a deterrent in here somewhere." Of the pistol—picking it up with wavering dread, "Come one step closer and I'll put a bullet through my foot."

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In the last week of March an elderly woman living a mile away was savagely beaten and presumably left for dead in the house which was then set on fire. She had somehow crawled outside, past the body of her poisoned German shepherd, attracted the attention of a passerby, and was recovering in a local hospital, but without a description of her two attackers; at the outset they had snatched off and broken the glasses without which she was as good as blind. She could say only that they were young and male.

A horrifying aspect was that her rings, a valuable watch, and $50 in cash had been ignored. It had been an evening's sport, her close to 80 years adding to the fun.

Laura was shaken but adamant. She had used up a good part of her reserves to buy the cottage three years before and she loved it and had lavished on it care and considerable planting. She had had tenants for most of that time and would again; this was simply a freakish interval.

There was a council of war behind her back, and on a rainy day in mid-April Marian Sargeant drove up with the Fenns.

Laura had met the Fenns at a cocktail party in New York the autumn before and liked them in the tentative way it is wisest to like people at cocktail parties. They were or had something to do with the theater—stage design?—and looked it: confident, handsome in their various ways, quick-tongued, given to extravagant gestures and emphasis.

"*Laura.*" Automatic cheek kiss from Coco Fenn although the three of them had spent perhaps forty minutes closeted in a smoky corner six months ago. "You're dear not to meet us at the door with a hatchet—see? I do know other writers—but word filtered down to us about your little nest here and we want to take a serious look at it before the one o'clock train back to town. May we?"

Then, turning quizzical when Laura had said certainly and was sorting through keys in a drawer, "It seems to me that you left that party with the elusive Emory Neal. Does one ask about him?"

In her novels Laura was clear, detached, a trifle wry. In the flesh, personal probings turned her nearly mute—and Kimber Fenn had not approved of this question; his sixtyish face with its look of elegant ruin had gone prim.

"Oh, that," said Laura, and handed over the proper keys. It was her nature to add, in spite of Marian Sargeant's wild eyebrows in the background, "You're going to find it rather small, I'm afraid."

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She nodded around her. "It's almost exactly like this."

"Well, the two of us don't add up to a horde," said Coco, amused and tolerant, and they went out into the rain. Marian accompanied them, her grim stare at Laura lodged in the air like an arrow.

For work purposes the morning was lost. Laura prowled into her monkishly bare bedroom for a blank survey of the page in the typewriter, and found herself trying to see the property through the Fenns's eyes.

Behind its deep driveway the cottage was white clapboard, four-windowed in front, its shutters faded to a silvery old rose which Laura carefully had not touched. It had been remodeled for double occupancy long before she bought it, and on both sides contained a fireplaced living room longer than it was wide, bedroom, bath, and kitchen of such a shape that it accommodated a small dining table at one end.

The back door opened onto a garden area in a surround of apple trees so old that although they bloomed in a prodigality which suggested bushel baskets, there was almost no fruit. But birds came and petals drifted sweetly and Laura would not have exchanged them for brisk young bearing trees.

The Fenns were exploring this aspect from partial shelter, because their voices echoed on the rainy air.

"Kim, just *smell!*"

"It's heaven."

And half an hour later over a glass of white wine to seal the pact, Laura had her new tenants.

Coco, clearly excited, said that the rent was ridiculously low after New York—this earned her an understandably sharpish glance from Kimber—and that it was just what they had been looking for. They were retiring to write a book about their experiences in the theater, and where better?

"And Marian, didn't we pass a shopping center of sorts not far from all this glory? We love walking, it's our only concession to health, and the distance is perfect."

As city dwellers they naturally did not have a car, and it was implicit that they had no intention of buying one. Laura, who made frequent forays in her own car to market, library, bank, and other goals, was the opposite of dismayed; the low thought crossed her mind that until the Fenns made friends here who might carry them off for long late evenings they would be anchored to the cottage. And Coco, perhaps 50, was obviously vigorous in spite of her artfully

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cream-and-pewter hair; Kimber looked taller than his almost six feet because of his stride with head tipped slightly back.

Still, they had to be told that all was not quite the unsullied innocence it might seem. Under Marian's ceiling-rolled gaze Laura recounted the vicious local attack in March, and when she had finished Kimber said incredulously, "A mile from here? Laura, a couple of months ago a man was strangled to death"—he choked himself expressively—"in the lobby of our apartment building. This is as safe as a church."

Laura kept a journal which was chiefly for professional use. In it, along with a record of work ("only 3½ p. but a good jumping-off place") she noted the weather, what was blooming from spring through fall, any important mail received or answered. That evening she wrote, "The Fenns move in next week. *Very* relieved."

When her new tenants had been in residence for ten days, Laura wondered how she had ever got along without them.

She hadn't realized—hadn't let herself realize—how much she had come to dread the approach of darkness. The Fenns, not pausing on the way home from office jobs for shopping or leisurely drinking, were always there for the occasion. Now there were lighted windows to proclaim full occupancy, dim but companionable other-kitchen sounds when she prepared her dinner.

Before the actual moving in she had had a faint thread of doubt about all-day people, particularly during the morning hours at her typewriter. She need not have worried; for the most part the Fenns had the friendly invisibility of money in the bank. Except for Kimber's early walk for the morning newspaper they didn't emerge until after two, and then it was for some weeding in the back garden or attention to the plantable strip that bordered the driveway on both sides. Here they had put in six tea roses and planned to add delphiniums. Laura was obediently admiring, although she preferred her own meadowy arrangement of grass long enough to ripple in the wind and soon to be starred with buttercups and daisies.

It was over the back garden that the first small oddity arose.

Laura was using a weed whip when Kimber, who with Coco had been outside observing the progress of their peas, came strolling across and said in an aghast voice as the fishing line cut, "Good God, what's that?"

"A hole. I keep filling it in but it keeps getting bigger."

Kimber peered in with a distaste bordering on alarm. "Couldn't

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it eventually undermine the whole house?"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Laura, although it was because of her slight uneasiness about the pit that she periodically let weeds grow tall around it. "It's probably an old dry well, and all the rain this spring has done something to it."

"*I'd* do something to it," said Kimber. "What about filling it in with gravel?"

Laura explained the obvious: the property was deep and narrow, and unless she had the garage demolished, which she wouldn't dream of doing as it was an absolute essential from December through March, there was no access for a gravel truck.

"Tomorrow is trash-collection day, and we missed it last week. We have *lots* of fill," said Kimber, inspired, and called to Coco, "Let's get all our stuff out here, hon."

The proceedings had an air of merriment. "Show me a man's bookcase and I will tell you his character," remarked Coco as their empty gin and vermouth and Scotch bottles and a few beer cans went sailing in, to be joined by Laura's contribution. "How much cheerier a kitchen midden than all those old bits of pottery."

"I think I'll prune it neatly around the edges," said Laura when they were done, because in spite of her nonchalance to Kimber she found something crocodilian about the sharp undercut of the ground. Then, after a rapid search of the wooden structure outside her back door, not much larger than a broom closet, "Could I borrow the spade?"

The terminology was courteously inaccurate; the spade belonged to her, as did the electric grass shears which she hadn't seen since lending those too.

"I returned the spade," said Kimber.

It was Laura's peace-keeping instinct to say, "Then it's around somewhere," even when she knew it was not, and quietly buy another spade. But this would be, she hoped, a long-term arrangement, and it had to be based on some measure of candidness. She nodded at the far side of the property. "Do you think you could look in the shed on the off chance? I *think* you used it for the roses."

She noticed for the first time that when Kimber was not out to charm, or was challenged in any way, his eyes were as loose and cold as oysters. Behind him, Coco, all amusement gone, turned on her heel and walked rapidly into the cottage. It was an uneasy revelation that even stronger than her dislike of controversy of any kind was a refusal of even the mildest questioning of her husband.

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Kimber stalked away in his turn, opened the shed door with controlled temper, and emerged with the spade and his amiability back in place. "Sorry, I could have sworn—"

And what, inquired Laura of herself that night, would Emory Neal have thought of the hole?

Coco had been accurate. Laura had left the cocktail party, mostly a literary one, with the man who turned heads not only because he was attractive but also the heir-designate of his fabled stepfather's publishing house.

The magnet effect had been strong, mutual, and instant. After a study which had seemed to touch her skin lightly from across the room, he had winnowed her deftly away from the Fenns. "I have to do a little borrowing here, do you mind?"

His directness after that was dizzying. "My name is Emory Neal, and I've been informed that you are Laura Milland. Did you come with someone?"

"No, it's a duty visit urged by my editor although I don't know why."

"Then could we go someplace where the air is clearer? I've just been talking for ten minutes to a man with a cigar."

His intensive pursuit of Laura was conducted chiefly on his ground, the belt of Manhattan where he was at ease, because the country made him feel like a nervous alien. "When did you last summon a cab out of a clump of sumac?" was his light covering of a genuine recoil.

On her side, although she depended on it for clothes and liked it for the theater and other festivities, New York's day-to-day aspect appalled Laura. She could have lived with the pollution; she could not live with the literal push.

A syndicated Solomon would have suggested a fifty-fifty split, which came down to each partner being discontented and restless for six months of the year. A pair in their twenties might have embarked on such a path without worry, but Emory was 40 and Laura was 38, and both had so far arranged their lives to suit themselves.

Separation, with a pang, not final but with an aura of review. Emory had gone on an extended visit to his mother in Paris, and would proceed on business to London.

Laura, arms crossed behind her head in darkness, knew precisely what he would say about the problem in her back yard. "Bless my

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soul," with every appearance of innocence. "An actual hole in the ground."

In mid-May, Laura took the train to New York for godmother duties. It was a gala occasion for everybody but the infant, who, having been sprinkled and adjured, "Paul Thomas, go in peace," was stripped of his heirloom yard-long christening dress, given a bottle, and popped back into his bassinet.

The parents conducted Laura and her answering number, a pleasant man with a huge red handlebar mustache, to a celebratory first-baby lunch at a French restaurant in the East Fifties. It was a long lunch, finished off with a final liqueur back at their apartment, and Laura did not get back from the station in Connecticut until after six o'clock.

To a totally different landscape.

The grass was gone, along with any possibility of lacquered buttercups and the nodding heads of daisies. In their place, to match the planting across the way and set in cruelly raw new earth, were six tea roses.

"Just like ours," said Kimber and Coco proudly; they had been watching for Laura's car and come out to meet her. "*The* most gorgeous colors, all the way from cream to burgundy. It was the least we could do, after all your ferrying around with those big bags of peat moss."

Just like ours. You don't have to be so unguidedly bucolic; with a little instruction you can become like us.

But their faces were so expectant. "I really did like my grass," said Laura faintly, "but I suppose this . . . Thank you very much. How much were the roses?"

"They're a gift, idiot," said Coco cheerfully, and plucked up folds of her vivid full-length skirt and went off up the driveway.

A small and unexpected rebellion stirred in Laura's breast. She did not take herself at all seriously, in spite of the publication of her novels in a number of foreign languages and intermittent fan mail; but in the light of the carnage which had taken place here neither did she care to be referred to, however indulgently, as an idiot. She repeated to Kimber, "I can't let you do this. How much?"

"Five fifty each—they're two-year canes and they'll bloom this summer," said Kimber. "But let it wait, for heaven's sake."

Laura did not let it wait. Inside, without even stepping out of her high heels, she wrote a check, walked out into the dusk, proceeded

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up the short neighboring path, and tendered the check when Coco answered the door.

"Laura, this was supposed to be a present. We didn't mean—"

"Don't fight about it, hon, if Laura wants to do it," said Kimber agreeably in the background. He was stirring a pitcher of martinis as he spoke, but that was as far as he went. Coco said with the overbrightness of someone tacitly forbidden to extend any invitation, "How was New York?"

"Lovely, and now I'm going to wash it off."

. . . He was still smarting about the spade, thought Laura with a flash of pure knowledge; not about being reminded of it, but having to give it back. Strange, under the circumstances, that he hadn't come marching haughtily over with the electric shears and, she remembered suddenly, her hand cultivator.

Well, that was a way of life with some people, and the basis for a great many jokes. She would simply ask for her things as she needed them, because she was certainly not going to make the smallest difficulty with the Fenns.

Here there existed a genuine *quid pro quo*. Every four or five days she drove them for a comprehensive grocery shopping and whatever else they wanted to do. In return, for all his wrist movements and the painstaking forward comb of his fair-and-gray hair to conceal incipient baldness, Kimber was knowledgeable about graphite in stubborn locks, fixing lamps, adapting electrical plugs.

Most of all, they were there, and with their roses and delphiniums and small vegetable garden showed every sign of permanency.

Two days after that, Laura's life took another little twist.

The elderly woman who had been attacked and had been making an apparently successful fight for survival died in the hospital.

She could not have explained why it made such a difference, but it did. What had been aggravated assault was now—what, manslaughter? Or, more baldly, slaughter. If there had ever been fingerprints, fire and then water would have erased them. There were two killers walking around.

Possibly even driving around, gathering an extra fillip from the mere fact of cruising unmolested through the general area? A number of cars did slow here, because at this time of year Hollow Road was like a long winding trip through a delightfully neglected garden. Whenever Laura was outside in front, getting her mail or contemplating the roses which she hoped meanly would succumb to aphids

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despite Kimber's vigilant and paternal care, her heart gave a thump at any car with two boys in it.

She told herself that people who would enjoy beating an old woman and then setting her house on fire were scarcely apt to be out reveling in Nature at one of its prettiest moments; but there were too many arguments against that. It was time to have the cottage painted again, and when Kimber and Coco proposed champagne color with cream shutters—didn't she think the present white with faded rose a tiny bit trite?—she agreed without demur, because all those passing cars would see the Fenns too.

The cottage did look attractive in its new paint, even if, to Laura, alien. A further change took place the following week, when a roving Dalmatian decided to make the Fenns's front garden his own. Their roses were only in bud and the delphiniums tall with promise, but at expense and great labor they had set out masses of pansies, blue and milky velvet, and these had been squashed into a muddy shambles by the dog's exuberant feet.

"*Damn* that dog," said the usually careful Coco. "What's the use of toiling over flowers if—?"

She looked close to tears of wrath and frustration. Laura had a gate made for the driveway, and although it meant getting out of her car to open it and then getting out again to close it behind her every time she issued forth, it was a small price to pay.

Two days of pouring rain caused the glass-and-metal fill in back to take a sly slump under its light covering of earth; but although Kimber could sometimes be seen brooding over it in its necklace of upsprung weeds, nobody said anything about it.

Laura's writing was going badly. In spite of a basic plot and situation in which she had faith she was stalled for what felt like forever on page 96. But she did not realize what was happening to her until a June evening when, the Fenns having finally decorated their side to suit them, they invited her and the Sargeants to dinner.

The Sargeants, Marian and Will, had a justifiable pride of accomplishment when they arrived. They exclaimed rapturously over the theatrical mementos which had an appearance of being tacked carelessly on the white walls; the darkly glowing antique buffet which tonight supported bottles, an ice bucket, and little dishes of olives and pickled onions; the black wall sconce which held, instead of candles, a pair of pink-gold tea roses pierced by soaked toothpicks embedded in corks.

The Sargeants had often been at Laura's, but never with these

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ecstatic cries. The area beyond the dividing wall was all at once as tired as old celery.

With a practised lack of fuss Coco served tender cubes of beef with crisp slivered vegetables in gravy over the thinnest of noodles, salad, cheese-and-sesame bread sticks which she had made that morning, and red wine. She and Kimber sparkled, and the Sargeants sparkled back.

It was Will who said over the dessert of brandied apples under custard, "Laura, you're not with us."

But she was, and seeing herself with a ruthless power of observation. Never stage center in any gathering, she had in a matter of weeks, because of her concentration on keeping the Fenns content under this roof, become a lay figure, a body which happened to be occupying this space or that. Knowing it was the first step to doing something about it. Such as what?

The next morning, in a ploy which had sometimes worked for her in the past, Laura took page 96 out of the typewriter without even glancing at it. She settled herself in the living room with her manuscript—*A Pocket of Cold* was its tentative title—and read it through from the beginning up to page 93, which was a chapter break. She then retyped the pages between 93 and 96, making a minor change here and there and getting rid of a lot of x-ings out, in the hope of catching her brain by surprise.

A car was coming up the driveway. For one illogical moment Laura thought: Emory?

No. From a gray Porsche emerged a couple with New York-come-to-the-country stamped all over them. The Fenns hurried down the path in obvious greeting, Coco in another of her long-skirted creations and Kimber wearing a plaid shirt outside denim cut-offs and rubber-thong sandals which to Laura, with an unsparing eye carried over from the night before, gave him the appearance of a boy who had risen from a fifty-year nap.

Embraces and handshakes announced them to be old and close friends. Laura, retreating to her typewriter with any possible edge lost by now, could not help imagining the conversation as the hours went by.

The Fenns were much missed by everybody, and although spring and summer and maybe even fall were all very well here, had they given any thought to the winter? Or: money had been rounded up for an off-Broadway production, a wonderfully witty little romp based on the *Dies Irae*, and the Fenns simply must come out of

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retirement to do the stage and costume design; it was just their kind of thing. They didn't have a lease, did they? Well, then?

Presently there would be a tour of the back garden, including the hole of which Kimber took such a somber view. If ever we saw quicksand, that's it, the friends would say, triumphant, and "Here you are spending money and working your knees to the bone when the whole damn place is going to disappear."

Laura could stand it no longer. She got into her car and drove away, leaving the gate open as had the Porsche owners. This was mutinous on her part but might be construed as a courtesy.

What would she do if the Fenns vacated? Advertise and hope for the best, because the frequent basking in her new security had made the thought of neighboring blackness and silence insupportable. It was like the reflexive and uncontrollable shiver which comes in warmth after exposure to extreme cold.

There wouldn't even be silence, just at first; the passage of feet, the opening and closing of windows, the use of water pipes left a remembering impact on wood and metal. It would sound, in the evenings, as if someone had slipped in while she was out.

Laura bought a scarf in a shop window and did some shopping which could have waited. It was after four when she got back, the driveway empty, the gate severely closed, Coco staking a delphinium which looked about to topple.

"I'm so sorry you missed the Michaelsons, Laura—they both loved your last book and they wanted to meet you. You should have heard them rave about this place—they own a condominium in town but they were actually jealous."

Satisfied with her staking, Coco straightened and delved into her skirt pocket for a cigarette and lighter. "In fact, they urged us to put everything in hock and make you an offer you couldn't refuse. No chance of that, I suppose?"

A best-of-both-worlds arrangement, Laura assumed, with the country solitude broken for the Fenns at will by New York friends coming for weekends with the latest gossip. "No chance at all, but thank you anyway."

"You'll eventually have family joining you," said Coco wisely.

Laura shook her head. "There's only my married sister, and she wouldn't dream of leaving Vancouver. It's the place for me, that's all. I can't imagine living anywhere else."

Her relief was so vast, her heart so light, that on the brink of going to sleep that night she remembered that the man who had

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built the gate and done other carpentry for her had mentioned having a superfluity of broken cinder block on hand. Although it would have to come through her front door and out the back, a few layers of it would take away the abyss flavor of the hole and keep Kimber happy.

By the next afternoon the job was accomplished, or partially so. Laura had underestimated the measurements—she refused to believe that they had extended while she wasn't looking—and there was still something of a pit. But the Fenns, who had come out to observe the goings-on from a distance, had surely heard the carpenter say that he had seen a sinking just like this out in Wilton and if he didn't know the cause he was still sure it had done its worst and Laura had nothing to worry about except maybe a lawsuit if somebody broke a leg. Come to that, she could gradually add her own fill of leaves, twigs, garden detritus.

And for the time being at least, apart from the minor repairs wanted by any tenants, this was it, wasn't it—the banishing of her ripply vista of green and white and gold, the nuisance gate, the new colors for clapboards and shutters, the cinder-block project which had left on her floors a parade of stubborn grayish footprints?

Laura discovered that it wasn't. When she went out at six that evening to pick young lettuce for salad, Kimber wandered over from his garden to join her. He said, indicating the house beyond trees where the owners came and went in their camper, "Isn't there a little boy over there from time to time?"

"Yes, their grandson."

"You might"—Kimber had strolled to the site of the afternoon's activities and Laura accompanied him automatically—"have to think about a fence here, for your own protection."

"I doubt it. They keep a very strict eye on him."

"Suppose he chased a ball. Kids do." Kimber had brought his drink outside with him, and now he took a deep and thoughtful swallow. "Actually, a white picket fence would look quite charming—two feet high should do it—and you could plant blue morning glories."

This was not counsel, Laura recognized with the astonished flinch of ice water poured down the back without warning; it was needling. Out of her own sharpened fear at the death of the valiant woman in the hospital she had betrayed herself to the Fenns, and if familiarity bred contempt, so, with some people, did any whiff of dependence. From now on it would be a matter of how many hoops they could put her through.

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Had all of it—everything done to the house and grounds—been merely to test their ascendancy? No wonder her writing was at a halt. She had begun it, certainly, but her personality was being peeled away from her so that only a mindless gratitude would remain. Every move she had made, every offering on the altar of security, had been snapped up with increasing appetite.

Or did their attitude reflect something much deeper than that? Laura, badly shaken, refused to look. A phrase which had been said to her with what in retrospect was a tiny show of teeth came back. She said evenly, "Don't you think white picket fencing and blue morning glories are a tiny bit trite?"

At the tone as well as the words, Kimber's face darkened incredulously with temper, as if, thought Laura, trying to neutralize the sudden pounding of her heart, one of his delphiniums had greeted him with a snarl.

Was it a trick of the light, or was he actually—?

She took a panicked step backward, and realized later that she had made it easier for him. Kimber flung his glass away, said, "Look out!" and started for her with the urgency of a man bent on averting a disaster.

A horrified bone-certainty arrested Laura's head in its instinctive turn, and she saw his expression. Somehow her feet got her to one side on the dew-slippery grass. Kimber's hand, with the fingers spread and curved for a murderous grip, only grazed her shoulder as he went plummeting past her into the hole.

Struck at that impetus, the broken block edges were savage. He had been stunned into unconsciousness, and a brief eternity went by before Laura knew that he wasn't dead. Parts of his body made trial twitches and gradually he got his head up, beginning to show a bloodied face.

Laura did not want to see his eyes. She said, "I'll get Coco," and hurried away.

She nearly tripped over the flung glass which had held his drink—the casual prop, the excuse to linger while he coaxed her over to the chosen spot. Had the carpenter's remark about the possibility of a broken leg suggested it? Would the idea ever have been born if their cherished friends, the Michaelsons, people of their own world, had not paid that lengthy visit and said something like, "Wouldn't it be marvelous if we could all four be together?"

There's only my married sister in Vancouver.

The Fenns's inner back door, like her own, stood open. The sound

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of Laura's sandals on the little apron of flagstones carried on the still air. From somewhere behind the screened door Coco's tense voice asked with a quality of hush, "Did you—?"

She came into view then, and saw Laura. If there had been the tiniest element of doubt in Laura's mind, it was gone at once. All the color drained from Coco's confident face, leaving it sick, frightened, faltering, undone.

What would they have said to her friends if things had gone according to their plan? Simple. "Poor Laura. She was really obsessed about the boys who attacked that woman, the one who died. We kidded her, sort of, to try to snap her out of it, but it's almost as if they picked up her brain waves."

Because although there was a chance that being sent violently down into the cinder block would have broken her neck or caused instant and fatal head injuries, there might well have had to be further assistance. And there were the handy scapegoats.

To Coco, Laura said without expression, "I think you had better help Kimber out of the hole."

And then, as Coco opened the door and started to brush frantically by her, Laura said, "You asked me once about Emory Neal. I'm going to call him now."

It was bravado, a guarantee of temporary safety, but also something far more. Was he even back from London? Time had taken such a steep tumbling around Laura that dates escaped her; it was, she thought, still wrapped in false calm, an occasion for one of those watches which showed you the month or ideally the year.

All at once a spacious apartment overlooking Central Park from seven stories up, the sole thing that had stood between them with its ramifications, had a strong appeal. But had Emory changed his mind? Laura went into her cottage, closed and locked the back door behind her, picked up the telephone, and dialed.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

They weren't rivals professionally—one was a writer, the other a designer. They weren't rivals for the same woman. They were rivals for something more difficult to attain . . . Sophisticated and sly, as usual from George Baxt . . .

WHAT'SISNAME

by GEORGE BAXT

This is the story I didn't include in my autobiography, the one so darkly alluded to by one of our leading gossip columnists a few weeks ago. Of course those who read her regularly (and I hereby confess my addiction) recognize all her allusions as dark ones, otherwise how else tease and titillate her readers? This is the item she printed verbatim: "Who threatened Andy Newlin into deleting from his autobiography the true story behind Michael Camba's murder?"

I, Andrew Newlin, can give you the answer to that one in one word: nobody. Michael's killer had neither family nor crime connections, and there wasn't even a lover in mourning. Michael's killer left behind nothing but the memory of his infamous deed. Michael Camba was a genius, his killer was merely talented, and therein lies the clue. I'm printing the story now only to set the record straight.

Only a true crime buff will the recognize this name—Sami Brzniwyrzi. You can also find it indexed in a few theatrical histories, but most of those are out of print. Sami hadn't designed a show on or off Broadway for almost decades before the murder. Michael, in the year of his murder, won both the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award.

Sami and Michael grew up together in the Canarsie section of Brooklyn. They were companions in grade school, high school, and

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college, each nurturing his ambition—Sami to be a great architect, Michael to be a great writer. The second World War interrupted Michael's ambition for over two years. Sami had suffered as a child with a rheumatic heart, and so he spent the war years apprenticing with an architectural firm on Wall Street.

Michael emerged from the war with the material for his first novel, *Dog Face*. He wrote it while sharing an apartment with Sami on Manhattan's West Side, in the Seventies just off Riverside Drive. Sami was the successful one, or so Sami told you. Michael took on odd jobs to support himself, not that Sami wasn't generous in covering the monthly rent, whenever Michael was running short.

It's a cliché, of course, to say they were just like brothers, though on the other hand I know lots of brothers who despise each other. Take my word for it, they loved each other and respected each other. They shared their ambitions and they shared their friends. A mutual friend introduced me to them at the time Michael submitted *Dog Face* to an agent. I handled the legal problems for Michael when the book was placed with Thalia House. I had just come to Klauds & Bergnoff as a junior clerk, and bringing in Michael proved quite a feather in my cap, especially when the reviews on publication a year later were mostly laudatory.

I should have sensed danger then. But who thinks of danger when you're in your twenties and a mutual friend has published his first novel and there are parties and new friends to be found. But when Sami made more of Michael's sudden celebrity then Michael did, I should have recognized the dark side of Sami.

Then all of a sudden Sami was out of a job. Michael was now the breadwinner. The positions were reversed and where Michael thrived, Sami brooded, and brooding breeds. Michael sold three short stories, one of which I thought was quite good, but the other two I felt traded on his celebrity.

Sami loathed the three of them.

"Keep grinding out this junk and you'll soon write yourself dry!" I remember Sami warning Michael. Sami's warning must have taken subliminal effect because Michael abandoned short stories to write a play, I realize now much to Sami's regret. In the meantime friends in the theater urged Sami to try his hand at stage design. He did and he was quite good. He passed the test to join the Set Designer's Union and in no time he was hired to do the sets for Lillian Jaekel's farce, *Three on a Mismatch*. It flopped, but Sami's ingenious depiction of a triplex led to a second commission.

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Meantime, Michael rewrote and rewrote his play and there were some of us who thought he'd never finish it. Sami confided to me he thought Michael didn't want to finish it because he couldn't face adverse criticism. I told him I thought he was being disloyal and he told me to do something that is physically impossible. I laughed it off at the time, my mind then dwelling heavily on my romance with my first wife and an opportunity to join a new law firm as a partner.

Of course, Michael eventually finished *September Mourn*. His agent recognized the work as something special and warned him she didn't think it would be an easy job placing it for Broadway production; but the lady was loyal and a fighter and was determined to see it mounted. Sami in the meantime was in the heat of his short-lived success. In all, he saw five of his designs make it to Broadway. But he rarely discussed the dozen or so that producers discarded. It was perfectly clear to almost everyone except Sami that his was a nice but slight talent. The fact that he tossed off his designs with the prolificity of a tired hack soon became common talk in theatrical circles.

The devastating blow came when *September Mourn* was finally optioned by a brave young man obsessed with becoming a success in the theater (and he did succeed). The brave young man was brave enough to stand up to Michael when Michael wanted Sami to design the set.

"Never!" shouted the young neophyte producer. "Your play deserves the best! Bel Geddes, Jo Mielziner, somebody like that. But your friend what'sisname? No way!"

I think that's when it began. What'sisname. Of course no one could pronounce Sami's last name. Go ahead, try it. Brzniwyrzi. He refused to change it, even though the father from whom he inherited it died a drunkard's death and was buried in Potter's Field. (I unearthed this information only recently. Sami concocted a fantasy that he was descended from Balkan royalty. His mother didn't deny it either and she embroidered the fantasy by throwing in some early Moorish ties and stood fast by the claim right up to her death.)

Brzniwyrzi. Hopeless.

Michael Camba's was an easy name to remember. *September Mourn* was a *succès d'estime*. It was a satire set in hell just as it was about to freeze over, and even the presence of three tired Hollywood "names" above the title did little to lure an audience. Today, of course, it is frequently revived by universities and regional thea-

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ters, and as I write this, a new production is being mounted by the Spiegelgasse Players of East Germany. It was Michael's second play, as you remember, that put him over the top. *Living With Lola* was a magnificent travesty based on the bawdy life of Lola Montez and it sold to the movies for half a million dollars and Michael Camba from that moment on could seemingly do no wrong.

Sami did not share in his best friend's success. He could have, because much against my advice Michael invited Sami to continue living with him when he bought his townhouse off Gramercy Park. But Sami was fed up living in reflected glory. Everywhere he went it was Michael-Camba-this and Michael-Camba-that, but never Sami-anything unless it was Sami What'sisname.

So Sami chose to remain in the old apartment while Michael moved on in affluence. Strangely enough, it was Michael who kept his head. He remained steady, sober, and industrious. His wit grew wrier and his talent continued to develop. He was still on the threshold of his greatest acclaim.

Sami, through the help of a charming woman who was madly in love with him, embarked on a new career as a freelance department-store window designer. It was at this period in his life he became a name dropper. The charming woman was a fringe personality in the entertainment world and her Sunday salons for a while were a "must." Michael came to many as did the occasional brilliant actor, author, politician, and poet. And Sami began detonating "names" like the mad bomber who was terrorizing New York at the same time Sami was terrorizing café society.

For example, Sami would enter a cocktail party declaiming, "Sorry I'm late!"—nobody having noticed—"I was having tea with Kit and Guthrie and Alfred and Lynn were there and Tallu dropped by with Cecil and . . ." so on ad infant item. After a while it got to be terribly funny and Sami's name dropping became an "in" joke that spread from coast to coast and over three continents. But it was Michael's devastating comment when Sami broke his leg that I think started the wheels of hatred turning in Sami's head: "Whose name did he drop on it?" The remark found its way into Earl Wilson's column and was later appropriated by Bennett Cerf for one of his humor anthologies. It made Sami's long-sought-after reputation, but it was not the reputation Sami had wanted.

The leg mended but the breach that now existed between Michael and Sami seemed irreparable. Michael was unhappy about this. He loved Sami. Sami would always be his best friend. Oh, they contin-

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ued to phone each other and meet for an occasional drink, but Sami confided to me at the time, "I no longer know how to deal with Michael." Of course I stupidly told that to Michael whose face briefly became a study. Then he said, "It's jealousy." I agreed. "Why is he so jealous of me? He's not a writer. He never wanted to be a writer!"

"He wants fame," I told Michael. "He wants the equivalent of your success and your celebrity. Everyone knows the name Michael Camba. But who the hell knows Sami Brzn—ch—ch—" And I still don't know why, but we both broke into hysterical laughter. Michael accepted that he and Sami were no longer close friends. There were new people in Michael's life—some were really enjoyable and Michael was friendly with my third wife. (The second came and went too quickly, and I can barely remember what she looks like.)

We'd occasionally run into Sami at the theater and in restaurants, and it was Michael who began to recognize the tragic signs. Sami was becoming an alcoholic. We saw his face fall into a plate of soup at Sardi's. At one opening night he fell out of his seat into the aisle in the middle of Ethel Merman's big number, and after that incident he never dared drop her name again, although she certainly dropped his.

At about this time Michael fell in love with an English actress and went to live and work in London to be with her while she appeared with the Old Vic. He fell in love with the city too and the British took to him and soon he traveled less and less to New York. He bought a house in posh Chester Square, and my fourth wife and I spent our honeymoon with him. I reported on Sami.

"He's been dried out twice but he's on his third binge. He's tried to write a novel and short stories and I heard he was collaborating on a play with some woman who I suspect is paying his bills."

"Should I send him some money?" asked Michael gravely and sincerely.

My fourth wife said, "If you did and I was Sami, I'd hate you even more."

"Even *more?*" Michael was almost in shock. "You mean he *hates* me?"

"I'm sure he does," she said with what I thought was unbecoming relish and may explain why three years later she was to speak unbecomingly of my fifth wife. "You've got what he wants—fame, money, celebrated friends, and a magnificent gift. He's fifth-rate. There are fifth-raters who know how to make a secondary talent work"—and she rattled off a roll call of movie stars and writers most

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of whom have since disappeared—"but Sami is too busy being bitter to be successful. I'd be careful, Michael."

"Of what?"

"Sami What'sisname. I suspect for years now he's built up in his mind a series of grievances against you. Now let me finish!" Michael had begun to remonstrate and I could see he was perplexed and upset. She began to tick off everything Michael had achieved that would forever elude Sami. Concluding, she said, "You've left him in the back stretch of an abandoned racetrack. It's too late for him. The parade's passed by. You're the parade."

"I'm going to New York. I'm going to find him and help him."

There was no arguing with Michael. We preceded him to New York and got the townhouse ready for his return. He wrapped up the revisions of his new play, *Sidney and Lewis,* which of course was based on Sami and himself when they were living in the apartment near Riverside Drive. Meantime, I began tracking down Sami and located the woman with whom he had been collaborating on the play.

Her name was Freda Quintain and she owned a bookstore on Third Avenue below Fourteenth Street.

"He walked out on me a couple of months ago." I'll spare you the details of their briefly sordid romance. It was obvious she wanted him back in any condition and she knew she had my sympathy. I almost blanched when she told me the play they had been working on was about life with Michael before Michael's success, but instead I choked on the brandy I was sipping. I almost burst into tears when she said softly and with great dignity, "If you run into Sami, tell him I want him to come back. He needs me to look after him. He's practically got no liver left."

I had a private detective on Sami's trail, but no Sami. Michael returned to Gramercy Park, and *Sidney and Lewis* went into production. On opening night I could have sworn I saw Sami lurking in the shadows of a building across the street from the theater. That opening night, as you theater buffs know, was a complete triumph for Michael. *Sidney and Lewis* was funny and sad and warm and ridiculous and to quote a famous critic, "It is almost too brilliant and that's just fine by me."

Yet when Michael emerged from Sardi's after the opening night party, a tomato smacked him in the chest. "My God," gasped the doorman, "that could have been a bullet!" My fiancée (soon to be my fifth wife) and I were with Michael and hurried him into his

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chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce, and we sped away to Michael's townhouse.

Later over drinks I urged Michael to report the tomato incident to the police. "What's the use? Did any of us see who threw it?"

"You know who threw it."

Michael stared into his glass. "I didn't see Sami. Did you?" I shook my head "No." He asked my fiancée. But she'd never met Sami—she wouldn't know what he looked like.

I felt there was an invisible cloud of doom hanging over the room, but I said nothing. On this night of his glorious triumph Michael Camba was the saddest man in the world. He was going to win the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award and I still have a vision of Sami sitting in some dingy bar somewhere watching the Tony Awards on television, and when Michael Camba's name was announced, hurling his glass with hatred and envy at the television screen.

It turns out that's exactly what happened. Sami told me this in his jail cell. He told me how he planned to finally make the name Sami Brzniwyrzi (I have double-checked this spelling) famous. He would assassinate a celebrity. The celebrity he chose, of course, was Michael Camba. It was all too easy. I don't think Michael fell into a trap. I think he knew that his fate was inevitable and decided not to prolong it.

As Sami related it to me, when he phoned Michael and pleaded to see him, Michael told him to come at once. Half an hour later Sami plunged the steak knife into Michael's heart. Death was instantaneous. Sami phoned the police and when they arrived, he confessed with alacrity, carefully spelling out his surname.

When I arrived, I was surrounded by the press. I was now a celebrity lawyer and my soon-to-be fifth wife was the daughter of a famous Washington family, and what with my being Michael's close friend, lawyer, and adviser, the press was having a field day.

But poor Sami. I did him in again. Talk about the best laid plans of mice and men, Sami's certainly went awry. You see, I had no idea who had murdered Michael when I arrived at the house. I had only been told on the phone that Michael had been killed, but not the name of the culprit. So when a reporter told me who had murdered Michael, I blurted out, "What'sisname? You mean he was murdered by What'sisname?"

The windows of the living room where Michael's body lay covered by a sheet, and where Sami sat in a straightback chair guarded by three policemen, were open. One of the policemen later told me that

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when Sami heard me refer to him not once but twice as What'sisname, he burst into tears. Poor Sami.

Poor Michael.

The memorial service was held at Radio City Music Hall and the overflow reached into the Avenue of the Americas. When Sami read about this in his jail cell, I'm told he beat his head mercilessly against the cement wall. I hoped his lawyers would enter a plea of insanity, and I am told they wanted to do just that, but Sami refused to acquiesce. He wanted the death penalty. Unfortunately, there is no death penalty in New York state. Sami drew thirty years to life. By the time he was sentenced, Michael's murder was old hat. There had been juicier celebrity killings since.

So Sami made one last effort to achieve fame. And this too was doomed to failure, my dear gossip columnist, which is why I chose out of kindness to ignore the incident in my autobiography (though my sixth wife argued I was wrong to do this). Sami committed suicide in his jail cell. He hanged himself with a bedsheet. And the irony is, only one tabloid made note of his self-destruction and this was the tiny heading of the one-paragraph obituary:

What'sisname a Suicide.

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a *NEW* Uncle George Crowder story by

HUGH PENTECOST

In the game they play, Uncle George Crowder is a senior disciple of Sherlock Holmes (and of Uncle Abner), and his nephew, Joey Trimble, is a junior disciple of The Great Detectives. Uncle George and Joey have been absent from the pages of EQMM for more than a decade, and as someone once wrote, absence has made our hearts grow fonder of the retired lawyer-sleuth and his courageous young hero-worshipper . . .

KEY WITNESS

by HUGH PENTECOST

The man on the rock ledge, rifle resting across his knees, watched the two boys and the dog in the clearing below. Their routine reminded him of a time long ago when excellence at something that wasn't crucially important could be a complete delight. The two boys, ten to twelve years old the man guessed, had a Frisbee. They would backhand it down the clearing and it would rise in its boomerang arc. The dog, a beautiful red-and-white setter, would race down the clearing under the Frisbee and at the last, the exact moment, would leap gracefully into the air, four, maybe five feet off the ground, and snatch the rubber saucer out of the air. It took absolutely perfect timing. It was a pleasure to watch because there was no way on earth it could have been better done.

The dog would trot back with the Frisbee in his mouth and put it down in front of the boys, who made a tremendous fuss over him. After a moment or two they would repeat the whole process. The dog never missed.

The man on the ledge had come quietly down into the clearing unnoticed. He spoke from just behind the boys.

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"Quite some animal," he said.

The boys turned, startled. One of them was blond, deeply suntanned, with bright blue, inquisitive eyes. The other was dark, also summer-dark, with nervous brown eyes. The dog, who had seen the man approaching, sat very still, alert, waiting for some sort of command.

"He's the greatest," the blond boy said.

The man squatted and put his rifle on the grass. He held out his hand to the dog. "Here, fella," he said.

The dog didn't move.

"He won't come to you unless I tell him it's okay," the blond boy said.

The man picked up his rifle and stood again. "My name is—is Smith," he said.

"I'm Joey Trimble," the blond boy said. "This is my friend, Tommy Benson." He grinned. Introducing a dog had an element of humor to it. "He's Timmy."

"He looks like he might be a good hunting dog under a gun," the man said.

"Best in town, maybe in the county," Joey said.

"Maybe in the whole state," Tommy said.

"Maybe in the whole world," Joey said, and reached down to stroke the setter's head.

"Yours?" the man asked.

"He belongs to my Uncle George," Joey said. "He went over to Hartford for the day and left me to look out for Timmy."

"Must have taken a lot of training for him to be so skillful with that Frisbee," the man said.

"We never tried it before," Joey said. "We saw a dog doing it on television, between halves of a football game. We wondered if Timmy could do it. He never missed!"

"If we threw it right," Tommy said.

"You boys interested in hunting?" the man asked.

"Gee, yes," Joey said. "I go out with my Uncle George and Timmy every hunting season."

"Like to see some guns I've got in my cabin?" the man said. "It's just up over the rise there."

"That would be great," Joey said. He thought of himself as an expert on guns—knowledge learned from Uncle George who was an expert on everything.

They climbed up the incline, Timmy walking quietly at Joey's

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heel. At the top of the rise they saw the log cabin.

"That's the Brod cabin, isn't it?" Joey asked.

"I don't know who it belongs to," the man said. "It seemed to be deserted, so I've been camping out there."

"I guess they haven't used it in years," Joey said.

The man opened the door to the cabin. "Bring Timmy in," he said. "I imagine he could use some water."

The cabin was thick with an accumulation of dust and dirt. The man went over to the sink in the corner, produced a crockery bowl from a shelf above it, and pumped some water into it for Timmy who accepted it gratefully.

Joey's eyes, wide with interest, were focused on a table in the center of the room. On it were two shotguns, a rifle like the one Mr. Smith was carrying, and what Joey, from catalogue reading, knew to be a machine pistol.

"You don't use that machine pistol for hunting, do you, Mr. Smith?" Joey asked.

Mr. Smith was standing with his back to the cabin door. He gave the boy a tight little smile. "I use that for killing people, Joey," he said.

Tommy Benson giggled. He knew an adult witticism when he heard one. Joey, who was looking straight into Mr. Smith's pale cold eyes, knew it wasn't meant to be a joke at all.

No one spoke for a few moments. The only sound in the room was the happy slurping of the dog at the water dish the man had put down for him. Joey Trimble and his Uncle George often played a game together. They called it the Sherlock Holmes game. Holmes would pass a man on the street and say, "For that reason I know he's left-handed, and for that reason I know he comes from South Wales, and for that reason I know he speaks fluent Arabic."

Joey and Uncle George played that game of observations and quick deductions from what they saw. Studying Mr. Smith, Joey thought the most unusual thing about him was his almost deathly pallor. Two or three days' growth of dark beard didn't hide it. Here was a man who talked about hunting and camping out in the woods, but he didn't seem to have been exposed to the sun for a long time. He must have an indoor job, Joey thought. Then he could hear Uncle George saying, "But doesn't he get a day off? Sunday, surely. He must get out in the sunshine sometime, mustn't he?"

"What are you thinking about, boy?" Mr. Smith asked.

Joey felt Timmy's cold wet nose nuzzle at his hand and his con-

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fidence grew. "I was thinking you must work indoors somewhere, sir," he said. "No suntan."

"I suppose you could say that," Mr. Smith said. "I broke out of State Prison three days ago where I was serving a life term for murder."

The two boys faced him, saucer-eyed.

"My name isn't Smith, in case you're trying to remember hearing about it. Now"—and the man drew a deep breath—"I don't want to frighten you boys more than is necessary, and I don't want to harm you unless I'm forced to. But you've both got to cooperate with me. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Joey said.

Tommy Benson was fighting tears.

"You, Joey, and the dog, are going to stay here with me. Tommy is going to take a message into town for me. Now, listen carefully, Tommy. You are to go directly to Joey's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Trimble. You're not to talk to anyone on the way. You're not to tell anyone on the way what's happened here. Understand?"

Tommy nodded, biting at his lower lip.

"You are to tell the Trimbles that Joey and the dog are being held as hostages. They are *not* to go to the police. They are to get to George Crowder and tell him he is the only person who can negotiate for Joey and the dog. If they go to the police or the state troopers, or if the sheriff and a posse come up here into the woods, I will first present them with a dead dog. If they persist, I will present them with a dead boy. Look carefully, Tommy, at my weapons. I can hold off an army if I have to. No police. No state troopers. No sheriff. Understand?"

Tommy nodded.

"Any questions?"

"N-no, sir."

"Go!" Mr. Smith said.

Tommy ran. They could hear him crashing through the underbrush on the way down the hill. Then there was silence, except for the absurd mimicry of a catbird on a tree outside the cabin.

"You scared, boy?" Mr. Smith asked.

"Yes, sir," Joey said, his hand linked to Timmy's leather collar. "You know George Crowder is my uncle?"

"Why else do you suppose I brought you here?" the man asked.

Hector Trimble is a man the people in the town of Lakeview call

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a "character." He is the local drugstore owner and its pharmacist. They say he washes his hands twenty-five times a day, which really isn't so eccentric for a man who is putting up life-and-death prescriptions for his customers. The same phobia for cleanliness, however, had other outlets. He won't allow his son Joey to own a dog or any other kind of pet. A dog hair might get into Mr. Wallington's cough medicine. Hector Trimble's life, from the hour to rise, to go to work, to report for meals, to go to bed, is run on a rigid schedule. To be late—or early—any one of these events is a sin.

The main cross that Hector has to bear—his own phrase for it—is his brother-in-law, George Crowder. Hector, thin, bald, dictatorial, is a far cry from George Crowder. Uncle George—everyone in town calls him "Uncle George"—had been a handsome, glamorous charmer as a young man. Over a span of years he had risen from a small-town lawyer to the state's attorney general. Everyone said that one day he would be Governor, or a United States Senator. In a sensational murder trial George Crowder convicted the defendant and sent him to his death. A year later new evidence proved that the dead man had been, beyond any doubt, innocent.

George Crowder resigned from public office, closed his private law practice, and disappeared from Lakeview. There were all kinds of rumors, chiefly that he was drinking himself to death in some faraway place. A dozen years later he reappeared. He was older, his dark hair was graying, the lines at the corners of his eyes and on each side of his generous mouth were deeper. His gray eyes were still inquisitive, could grow warm with compassion, sparkle with humor. He built himself a cabin in the woods and settled down to live there, alone except for a handsome setter dog. Old talents of his youth were sharpened, and he could out-hunt and out-fish any man in the county.

The reason Uncle George was a cross to Hector Trimble was that Hector's son, Joey, idolized George Crowder and tried to model himself after his uncle. Red Egan, the local sheriff, once said that there were two miracles about Hector Trimble. "It's a miracle that he ever persuaded the beautiful Esther Crowder to marry him," Red said, "and it's a miracle that he ever produced a son like Joey." The boy's relationship with Uncle George was the one area in which Esther put down her foot, hard. Joey, however determinedly Hector resisted it, was going to be a Crowder.

Supper was at six. That summer evening Esther had prepared potato salad and a home-cooked baked ham. At precisely six o'clock

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Hector was ready for it, but Joey wasn't there.

Hector stood by his place at the head of the dining-room table, frowning down at his old-fashioned pocket watch which he held in the palm of his immaculately scrubbed hand.

"He is two minutes late," Hector said. "Hanging around with your brother again, Esther."

Esther, at the sideboard, was serving the potato salad, garnished with garden herbs, and the baked ham. "He isn't with George," she said. "George went to Hartford today to visit some old friends. He isn't expected back till later this evening."

"It doesn't matter," Hector said. "Joey's got to learn respect for family routines. When he does come he will be told he is to be housebound for a week!"

"I think he's here now," Esther said. They could both hear the running footsteps coming up the path from the street to the front door.

Hector pocketed his watch, stood erect and waiting—Jove prepared to launch a thunderbolt. But of course it was not Joey who charged in the front door. Tommy Benson, who had given away to tears by now, threw himself at Esther Trimble. It poured out of him, reasonably clear. There was a murderer who had escaped from jail, there were guns, Joey and Uncle George's dog were hostages, they mustn't go to the police or the dog and Joey would be killed, Uncle George was the only person who could negotiate.

Hector listened and walked out to the front hall. He took his Panama straw hat from the hat tree and put it on his head.

"Where are you going, Hector?" Esther asked.

"To Sheriff Egan, of course," Hector said. "Come with me, Thomas."

"The man said not to go to the police!" Tommy cried out.

"My son has been kidnaped," Hector said. "I pay taxes for protection. Naturally, I will go to the police. Come, Thomas. You must tell Sheriff Egan your story."

"Hector!" There was a surprising sharpness to Esther's voice. "If anything happens to Joey because of your pigheaded stubbornness I promise you you'll wish you'd never been born!"

Esther Trimble drove up the old logging road at the far end of town to Uncle George's cabin. It was, as she expected, deserted. George was in Hartford and Timmy was being held hostage along with her beloved Joey. Twilight faded into early evening before,

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sitting on the cabin's front steps, Esther saw the headlights of Uncle George's Jeep coming up the trail.

George Crowder knew his sister so well that he didn't have to be told that something was wrong. He could feel her strong fingers bite into his arms, contradicting the calm of her voice as she told him what had happened. He led her into the cabin and switched on the lights. Out there in the woods Uncle George had his own electric generator. The lines at the corners of his mouth and in his frown were etched deep in Uncle George's face.

He took off the summer jacket he'd worn to Hartford and began putting on a canvas hunting coat with deep wide pockets.

"The man is Mark Jepson," he told his sister. "It's been all over radio and TV. He escaped from State Prison three days ago. He was Jason Brod's stepson, and was convicted of murdering the old man."

"Has he got something against you, George?"

"Me! Why should he?" Uncle George was emptying a box of bullets into the pocket of his coat. "I never had dealings with him of any kind."

"I thought this was maybe some kind of trap for you, George."

"I think he wants help from me," Uncle George said. He took his rifle down from the pegs over the fireplace. "This is just in case I'm wrong—or in case Sheriff Egan has listened to your stubborn husband."

"Joey matters to me, George," Esther said.

Uncle George put his arm around his sister's shoulders. "Of course he matters everything to you, Es—and everything to me. Keep your cool, my dear. Joey's going to be all right, unless Hector's persuaded Red Egan to mess things up."

Uncle George could have walked blindfolded through the woods around Lakeview. He knew the dips and rises, the rocks and crevices as well as he knew the face he saw in his shaving mirror each morning. It was no problem for him to approach the Brod cabin without the use of a torch or flashlight. Finally he saw its dark shape looming up ahead of him. There was, so far, no sign of the state troopers or Red Egan and a local posse. The sheriff, an old crony of Uncle George's, had used his native intelligence instead of listening to what must have been authoritarian demands by Hector Trimble.

Uncle George crouched behind a growth of wild raspberries, trying to remember what he knew about the Brod case. Jason Brod had been a sort of local saint to the people of Lakeview. Very rich, he

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had donated a new wing to the Lakeview hospital; he had provided a large bathing area at the lake, which he maintained at his own expense and to which the people of the town had free access; he was lovingly remembered for his private charities to people in need. He had married a second time, a widow somewhat his junior with a teen-aged son, Mark Jepson. About a year after the marriage the lady, who was "well liked" by her new neighbors, died of a heart attack, leaving her son in the care of Jason Brod. Jason turned from a gentle, kindly, compassionate man into a bitter, angry, caricature of himself. He and Mark Jepson, his stepson, were at odds from the beginning. Neighbors and servants told of wild, angry shouting matches between them. This went on for five or six years until Mark was in his twenties.

Why did Mark, now an adult, stay on in that atmosphere? The answer, people said, was money. He was Jason's heir, a promise made to the late wife.

One night, about a year ago, there had been one of those screaming quarrels. Jason's housekeeper reported she heard Mark shouting at old Jason that "One of these days I'm going to kill you!" A couple of hours later, at eleven o'clock at night, Jason Brod called his lawyer, old Dave Winship, and demanded an appointment for first thing in the morning. "Promise or no promise, Dave," Jason told his friend, "I'm going to change my will. That damn boy is never going to get a penny from me."

It was then that Dave Winship heard the shot that ended Jason Brod's life.

Naturally the state troopers looked for Jepson. He turned up around breakfast time. He acted stunned when he heard what had happened. His story was that after his quarrel with Jason he'd taken his car and driven off—just to get away. At the time Dave Winship heard the shot over the phone he was sixty miles away across the county. Proof? Actually he'd stopped to help a woman who'd had a flat tire and skidded off the road. No, he didn't know her name, but her car had an in-state license and she could certainly be found to back up his story. But the woman was never found and she never came forward. Jepson's court-appointed lawyer advertised for her, made pleas on the radio and television. The woman had vanished—or had never existed.

The gun used to kill Jason Brod belonged to Mark Jepson. It was kept in an unlocked gun case in the library. Jepson's fingerprints, not unnaturally, were on it. There were no others. A grand jury

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indicted Jepson and he went to trial for first-degree murder three months after the event. Clay Vanderpool, the brilliant state's attorney, was the prosecutor and everyone knew that Mark Jepson didn't have a chance.

On the first day of the trial, during jury selection, the court recessed for lunch. Standing while the judge was retiring from the bench, Mark Jepson claimed he saw the woman whose tire he'd changed and who could save him, leaving the courtroom. In a kind of frenzy he tried to go after her, but was restrained by guards. His lawyer, not knowing whom to look for, went out onto the street, but found no one.

Two hours later, about ten miles out of town, a tractor-trailer truck carrying a towering load of logs toppled over on a small sedan and crushed it and its driver—a woman. She turned out to be a much-loved schoolteacher named Elsie Collins in the town of Buttrick, about fifty miles away. When a studio photograph of her appeared in the next day's paper, Jepson almost went crazy. She was the woman!

Clay Vanderpool, the prosecutor, turned the whole situation to his own advantage. "He claims he was helping a woman at the time of the murder, a woman who never came forward—if she exists. He then says he saw her in court and then identifies her by pointing to a dead woman who can't speak. Very shrewd, very clever—and complete hogwash."

The jury believed Vanderpool, convicted Jepson, and the judge sent him to prison for life. Vanderpool, his reputation enhanced, was now the state's attorney general, headed one day for the Governor's mansion or the United States Senate. Uncle George knew how gratifying that could be. He had once been in that position himself . . .

"Crowder!" a loud harsh voice called out from the cabin. "I know you're out there. This dog of yours has been telling me so for the last twenty minutes. Come a little closer so we can talk, and remember I've got a gun on the boy and the dog."

"I'm coming in," Uncle George called out, and moved toward the cabin.

"Not too close!"

"All the way in so we can talk face to face," Uncle George said. "Think a minute, Jepson. I can't help you if I'm dead, and I won't help you if you harm the boy or the dog."

There was scarcely any light from the sliver of a new moon, but

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enough so Uncle George could see the cabin door open when he was a yard away and the outline of a man with a gun at the ready. Uncle George, his own gun tucked under his arm, walked straight past the figure in the doorway and into the inner darkness.

"Uncle George?" A small frightened voice.

"No need to whisper, Joey," Uncle George said.

And then the boy was in his arms and a happy setter dog was clawing at him and licking at his face.

The figure in the doorway spoke at last. "Some kind of a gutsy nephew you've got here, Mr. Crowder. And some kind of a well trained dog."

"I'm glad—for your sake, Jepson—to find them unharmed," Uncle George said.

"Only way I could figure to get you here, Mr. Crowder."

"Why me?"

Jepson's voice had a harsh edge to it."You once convicted an innocent man of murder," he said. "I thought you might be willing to help another innocent man who's been wrongly convicted."

"You didn't kill Jason Brod?"

"I hated his guts," Jepson said. "I dreamed of killing him. But I didn't do it."

"He was sixty miles away when it happened," Joey said. He was wriggling with excitement in the protective curve of Uncle George's arm.

"Changing a tire for Miss Elsie Collins," Uncle George said.

"You're familiar with the case, then, Mr. Crowder," Jepson said.

"I read the local papers and listen to the gossip in town when I go in for groceries."

"You know Miss Collins could have cleared me," Jepson said.

"I know your lawyer claimed that," Uncle George said. "So why didn't she?"

"She couldn't!" Joey cried out. "She got killed in an accident."

Uncle George patted his nephew's blond head. "You seem to have got yourself a new defense attorney, Jepson," he said.

"He listens, which is more than I can say for most people," Jepson said.

"I'm listening, Jepson," Uncle George said.

Jepson's voice was bitter. "When I was arrested I had no money," he said. "I couldn't draw on my inheritance from Brod. If I killed him I couldn't inherit. The court appointed a lawyer for me, young Joseph Calabria, just out of law school. He never believed me, but

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he said I was entitled to the best defense he could give me."

"Which wasn't good enough."

"The woman, Miss Collins, was the key witness," Jepson said. "We didn't know her name then, you understand. We advertised for her, and tried every way to get her to come forward, but she never did. Later we learned that the morning after I helped her with her car she took off for a summer vacation in Europe. She never heard the news, never found out that we were looking for her. The day before my trial started she got back from abroad, caught up with the news, and came to the courthouse to take a look at me. She had to have recognized me as the man who'd helped her with her tire three months before. She walked out of the court at the recess. I didn't see her till just then. Calabria couldn't catch up with her, wouldn't have known her if he'd seen her.

"Two hours later she was dead, ten miles away from town on the way back to where she lived in Buttrick. The $64,000 question, Mr. Crowder, is this: what did Elsie Collins do in the two hours between leaving court and getting killed on the highway? Calabria did his best, I think, but he couldn't find anyone who'd seen her in those two hours. She didn't go to any local place for lunch. She had a couple of friends in town, but she didn't see them or get in touch with them. She just vanished for two hours, then headed for home and got killed."

"Your theory?" Uncle George asked.

"She went somewhere to tell someone she recognized me and that I had to be innocent."

"Somewhere?"

"Only two places," Jepson said. "The state police, who built the case against me, or Clay Vanderpool, the prosecutor who was out to get me hanged."

"No capital punishment in this state," Uncle George said.

"Spending the rest of your life in jail is worse than being hanged," Jepson said. "Calabria tried both the state troopers and Vanderpool. They all denied that Elsie Collins had ever contacted them. They were all convinced I'd picked her out to save me because she was dead and couldn't deny what I said."

"If it wasn't for the terrible bad luck of the accident they'd have had to use her testimony, wouldn't they, Uncle George?" Joey asked.

"They sure would," Uncle George said.

"The troopers wanted to solve the case," Jepson said. "Old Jason Brod was the local benefactor. They picked me and they weren't

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looking anywhere else. Vanderpool saw a political advantage in nailing down the lid on my coffin. With the woman dead they could just let my trial ride and take the glory. To hell with me!"

Uncle George sat silent for what seemed like forever to Joey. Then he gave Joey a little hug and stood up. "I'll give it a try, Jepson," he said.

"I'm not going back to jail, Mr. Crowder," Jepson said. "You send the police or the sheriff and his posse up here after me and I'll kill just as many of them as I can before I put this rifle barrel in my mouth and pull the trigger."

Uncle George looked down at his nephew. "You afraid to stay here with Mr. Jepson, Joey—you and Timmy? Because if I take you out with me I won't be able to control what the state troopers or the sheriff may do. As long as they think Mr. Jepson is still holding you hostage they won't make a move till I say so."

"I'm not afraid, Uncle George," Joey said.

It was nearly midnight when Uncle George drove down the main street of Lakeview in his Jeep. The town was usually put to bed by that time of night, but on this occasion there were quite a few lights visible. The news was out. Hector Trimble's boy was being held hostage by a killer.

Uncle George pulled up outside an old Colonial house just across from the library. People were still stirring in this place where Clay Vanderpool, the prosecutor, lived. Vanderpool would have been among the first to get the news.

Vanderpool, a thin wiry man with steel-rimmed spectacles, opened the door himself. He saw George Crowder, a gun tucked under his arm.

"Mr. Crowder! Come in! What's the news? You've talked to Jepson?"

"I've talked to him," Uncle George said.

"The boy?"

"Safe and sound for the moment," Uncle George said. He looked around Vanderpool's comfortable, antique-furnished living room.

"What does he want?" Vanderpool asked. "What's he asking for?"

"The truth," Uncle George said.

"Sit down. Can I get you a drink—some coffee?"

"Just the truth, Vanderpool," Uncle George said. He didn't sit.

"The same old baloney about the dead woman who could have proved his innocence? God Almighty, Crowder, the man is guilty."

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"I think you believed that in the beginning," Uncle George said.

"I still believe it."

"Even after Miss Collins cleared him?" Uncle George asked.

"Miss Collins never cleared him. The unfortunate woman was killed in a car accident. Jepson picked her out of the blue when she could no longer deny his story."

"I have a witness," Uncle George said, "who saw Miss Collins go to your office during the lunch break that first day of the trial."

A nerve twitched high up on Vanderpool's cheek. He was a shrewd, very clever man, but not a strong man. There was sudden fear behind those steel-rimmed glasses.

"I've been in your shoes, you know," Uncle George said. "I sent a man to the gas chamber who turned out to be innocent. You have a chance to repair your mistake."

"I haven't made any mistake," Vanderpool said.

"To begin with you denied Miss Collins ever came to see you. My witness knows better."

Vanderpool moistened his suddenly dry lips.

"I put myself in your shoes, Vanderpool, and I can almost replay it step by step," Uncle George said. "At the lunch break that first day of the trial you went to your office. You were alone. Your secretary was probably having lunch at the coffee shop. Miss Collins walked in and told you why she hadn't come forward before. She'd been in Europe. But she'd just seen Jepson in court, recognized him, and could clear him. It was your duty, as an officer of the court, to take a statement. You did. You're an honest man—when it doesn't hurt too much.

"You saw your case going down the drain, the political advantage to you lost, the state police discredited. But you took her statement. After she left, you sat there, wondering how you could reorganize your prosecution. You were on your way back to court, prepared to hand over Miss Collins' statement to the defense as the law requires, when you heard that Miss Collins had been killed in a car accident. No one knew she'd been to see you—except my witness. You could just withhold her statement and go on with the prosecution of an innocent man."

"A *guilty* man!" Vanderpool protested. "Everyone knew how much he hated old man Brod. And it was his gun."

"Which anyone could have taken out of the unlocked gun case."

"We'd have had to put the pieces together again—to make them fit."

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"But now you didn't have to. You could just withhold that statement and you had your man cold. He's got a right to the truth now. He can stand trial again if you find new evidence, but for now he must go free. If you won't go to the police with me, Vanderpool, I might just commit a murder myself. That nephew of mine means everything to me."

There were a few moments of silence and then Vanderpool seemed to shrivel. "Okay, I'll do what you say. I'll go with you to the police. But the man is guilty, I tell you! Now that I've agreed to what you've asked, will you tell me who your witness is? Your key witness?"

Uncle George gave him a thin smile. "You mentioned him yourself not long ago, Vanderpool," Uncle George said. "God Almighty. He saw and heard everything. He might not have testified against you now, but he'd have used it against you in the most important trial of your life—which you'll have to face later."

Vanderpool stared at Uncle George for a moment, then began to laugh. There was an hysterical note in his laughter.

Esther Trimble had made a cup of hot cocoa for Joey and provided Uncle George with two ounces of his favorite bourbon whiskey. Hector Trimble sat stiff and erect in the corner of the kitchen.

"How did you deduce it was Mr. Vanderpool?" Joey asked.

"It had to be either Vanderpool or the state police," Uncle George said. "If she'd gone to the trooper barracks to make her statement, Miss Collins would have been seen. There would have been the desk sergeant, and a trooper to take her to the commanding officer. She'd have been seen in the corridors, in the parking lot. The commander might have withheld her statement—the state police wanted their case to stand up. But the whole trooper force couldn't have been involved in a conspiracy."

"So who killed Jason Brod?" Hector asked from his corner.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Hector," Uncle George said. "That's a new job for the state police. I have pleasanter things to think about. Like going fishing tomorrow with Joey and Timmy. What do you say, Joey?"

"Oh, boy!" Joey said.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

CLEMENTS JORDAN

There is no way to describe this story in precise terms—its poignancy, its sense of understanding, its tone and substance and credibility. You simply have to read it, keeping your mind and heart open . . .

COME TO ME, TESSIE

by CLEMENTS JORDAN

Tessie, it is so pleasant here under the shady trees. Maybe someone will bring us cool drinks if they are not too busy. My room is so cramped, but out here I can tell you everything privately, and then I want to ask you a favor.

Tessie, do you remember me when I was good? Friend of my yesterdays, we walked everywhere with our arms around each other's waists and told each other our secrets. You were there when I found the little doll and you knew how much I wanted it. But I left it because I pictured its owner returning for it and crying if she found it gone. That was good of me, wasn't it? We were only six.

We were so poor, dear, your family and mine living on the edge of a neighborhood where everyone had more than we. Our houses were separated from theirs by an alley and then a double row of trees, like lines drawn between us and them. Their yards were lush with flowers and grass. We had no front yards at all. Our houses were at the edge of a steep bank reached by steep steps. Our back yards were hard plateaus of sour soil which my mother's magic prevailed upon to yield vegetables that were so welcome on our table. Their trees were tall and graceful, ours stunted and gnarled. Their houses were spacious. Mine, the smallest on even our mean street, opened on a narrow hall. On one side of it was my parents'

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bedroom and the bathroom. On the other side was the living room where I slept on a couch, and the kitchen. My clothes hung in the hall closet.

Your father was dead and your mother worked at an ill-paying factory job to support you and your younger brother. My mother was huge, shapeless—and ugly, I suppose—but she was warm and loving and all of home to me. When she clasped me in her feather-bolster arms and crooned, "My smart, good little girl," I felt assured of all things bright and wonderful. My father was the town drunk. Your brother spent his days at the nursery school, but you stayed at our house when not at school and we were closer than sisters. But you were not as limited as I was. You were beautiful and happy-hearted and even the rich kids would have welcomed you. Marcia Brownley asked you to play dolls on her porch, but you stopped when you saw me peeking through her fence, and came and put your arms around me and walked away with me.

Throughout school we were together, though again so many choices were open to you. I was still the one to whom you told your secrets—the handsome football player you worshipped from afar, the dress you wished you had but your brother needed his tonsils out. I confided that I intended to work for a scholarship—the one consisting of a gold medal and all four years of college expenses. I knew I was not beautiful but I had found out I was smart. We were fourteen. I was still good. I wanted nothing that was not mine. I swear.

I began to work for that scholarship. I planned to go to a distant college in a town with opportunities. I even made a poor joke to myself: Beauty goes but ugly lasts. Besides mother, you would be the only one I would miss.

Then the unbelievable happened. Albie Burton noticed me! He smiled and said he'd noticed we had the same study hall. I was ahead of him. I'd known since September. He asked Miss Philips if we could study together and, oh, bliss, she said yes. Every day he waited for me outside English class and we walked to study hall and did our homework together. Albie Burton, the best athlete! Even your eyes grew round when you saw us together.

I was a junior then and—call me a fool—but I, who had never had a date, wondered if I could learn to sew well enough to make a dress for the prom. It needn't cost much. Surely there had to be a sale where I could get material I could afford.

I did not have to learn how to sew. In the library I saw Albie

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headed down another stack and was about to call out to him when I saw he was not alone. Lena Colby followed him and he grabbed her and gave her a quick kiss.

"Just a minute," she said. "Who said you could do that?"

"Pardon, ma'am, could I please have another li'l old kiss?"

"Aren't you cute? I'm not sure I know you well enough. Certainly haven't seen much of you lately."

"Well, gosh, you know why. I've been working like a mule on geometry. The coach said he'd give me the heave-ho if I didn't raise my grades. Harriet what's-her-name's been helping me. Don't you want to see me out there doing my stuff for dear ol' Hilton High when you come to the game?"

I left, forgetting what I had been trying to find, and went to my guidance counselor to have my study hall changed. From now on I'd concentrate where it would do the most good. Accuracy was not enough. My papers had to be meticulous. If one book of outside reading was required, I read two or three. No reference was too slight to track down, no date too obscure to note.

But you remember award day, don't you? Ted Kent got my scholarship. The principal spouted some nonsense about Ted taking part in all school activities and being "all around" and only a "split hair" from first in grade averages. Then he added insult to injury by presenting me with a *silver* medal. He said humorously (!) that they need not expect that to become an annual custom. The silver medal would be awarded only this once since my grades were so high they felt I deserved recognition too. Needless to say, there was no money attached, no scholarship. You were the only one who saw me cry, Tessie—a little.

A few days later was the last time I spoke to you till now. I came up to you in a group and some other girls were inviting you to go with them to a party after the graduation—an all-night, breakfast-at-dawn kind of thing—and you said no, that you had plans to go to a play with me.

"Oh, lord, Tess," one of them said, "go to that some other night. Why hang around with *her?* You'd have more fun with a leper."

"Harriet's all right," you said, *"and she hasn't anybody else."* I confronted you. I marched right up, looked you in the eye, and said evenly, "You don't have to have me on your mind."

You left them and came after me, protesting that you'd rather be with me, reminding me how long we had looked forward to that play, how we had saved for good tickets and rejoiced that the play

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had been scheduled for this special night. "Do as you please," I said coldly. "I'm cashing in my tickets."

Those were my last words to you. No intervention of our mothers, none of your tears swerved me. I walked a different path if I saw you coming, turned my head if I saw you too late.

Of course there was another way I could go to college. I could work, go to the local college, and postpone leaving town until I received my diploma. I got a job as an aide in the retarded-children's ward in the asylum in our town. I learned there are as many gradations of retarded people as there are of normal. There were many who congregated around the walls of the central room, sitting or leaning against them. They reeked; their tongues protruded; they stared into the distance. They were in the charge of broad, huge-handed women who efficiently and, usually, patiently hoisted them up and down, backward and forward, wiped their noses and chins, and propelled them about.

As to those in my care, the stranger across the street might not notice the shamble in their walk, the vagueness in their eyes. He might not linger long enough at the playground to see how seldom they caught the ball or how incoherent their speech became under stress.

Supervised, these children could cope with their days. It was my job to see that they washed for lunch and ate it without becoming excited and disorderly. Afterward they had games and activities involving simple counting or rhymes designed to be speech lessons. I read aloud to them. This was advanced treatment for those days when such patients were mostly allowed to vegetate.

Our asylum had many modern ideas such as separate cubicles for older inmates on the theory that the extra privacy promoted a greater sense of security and a pride of possession. Also, separately, each child was easier to control.

Even with these innovations it was hard to get aides. After a time their jobs depressed them. There was a heavy demand for highly trained technicians as well as for those like me whose only requirements were stamina and patience—and lack of squeamishness. When they expressed some doubt concerning my youth, I swore that I would not quit because of any little unpleasantness.

Somehow I loved the work. I felt useful, Tessie. I was all set—college classes in the morning, job in the afternoon, study at night. I wanted no more.

But that dream failed too. My father was injured almost fatally

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on his job at the mill—his own fault, the foreman pointed out. The company would pay his medical expenses out of loyalty to an old employee, but we need not think we could bring legal action. The company did pay his hospital expenses, even bought the wheelchair he used for the rest of his life. And it was lucky I was working. So many people had no job. With my father's disability pension and my wage we had almost as much as his take-home pay.

Ironically, part of this had to be budgeted for my father's liquor. The doctor claimed that complete abstinence, on top of the shock of his accident, would probably kill him. My father had been a "quiet" drunk, nursing his bottle in some corner of a saloon until it closed, staggering home to stumble up the steps of the porch, falling across the bed until the alarm clock sounded, rising for the carefully hoarded morning drink, then managing to get through the working day. Over the years I'd scarcely seen him except at intervals on weekends and holidays when he came trembling-handed and morose from his room for meals. I sometimes try to remember things he said, and cannot. Not one.

Mother had been all she could to me, supporting my belief in a hopeful future, and by sheer weight of her normalcy, lessening the shame I felt of my background. Now we were both stricken. She aged twenty years during his first months home. No longer quiet, he was ranting-mad at the world. He would scream, curse, weep aloud, refuse food, and knock the glass of rationed whiskey from my mother's hand. The doctor's prescription of tranquilizers and sleeping pills had little effect. What could we do? Only one thing. On my way from work each day I stopped at the liquor store. The bottle I brought to him was as effective as the bottle of milk stuck in the mouth of a crying baby. Under its influence he consented to learn to use the wheelchair, propelling himself from room to room, later to the porch where he sat and gazed with unfocused red eyes toward the trees, enduring the time between bottles.

I can never know if I would have thought of it, however hopeless I became, if not for the letter. Our only relatives were distant cousins with whom we were on Christmas-card terms. Bills were the only regular mail we received. That afternoon as I mounted the steps, my father was sitting on the porch, dozing. The weather had turned chilly and my mother had tucked a blanket around his useless legs. The white of the envelope was outlined on the blanket.

The letter had been opened and I idly picked it up, wondering at the rich quality of the paper, noting that there was no "window" in

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it. It was addressed to my father but somehow I did not feel guilty as I pulled out the letter on my way to the kitchen to put away the groceries I had brought. From the kitchen window I could see my mother gathering laundry from the clotheslines in the back yard.

The letter was brief and I read it in a minute. It stated that the insurance which my father had with his company was about to lapse. The company had kept it in force for a year after my father's accident but could do so no longer since he had not worked until retirement age. This was to notify him that if he wished to keep up the insurance he must pay the premiums himself. The first would be due within 30 days of the date given.

The size of the premium was staggering to me. It had been considerably less under the group plan of the company and had been automatically deducted so that we had never missed the money. How could I ever pay it? How could I dare not to? Dad could not possibly get other insurance. I glanced out the kitchen window again and wondered if mother had seen the letter. It had been on *top* of the blanket and had probably been handed directly to Dad by the mailman after Mother had gone inside. I would wait to see if she mentioned it. If she didn't, I wouldn't worry her with it. I took the letter into the living room and tucked it under a sofa pillow.

During the next week I decided that Mother had not seen the letter. I could not even swear that Dad had read it. Had he opened it and dozed off before reading it? Had he read it and failed to grasp its meaning through the fog of unreality that surrounded him? Possibly he had thought he dreamed it because he had never seen the letter again. With so little communication between us I could not tell.

I had many bitter thoughts throughout the week. That insurance policy was for $10,000 dollars—a fortune! What good use Mother and I could make of it after his death! I could go to college, and keeping my job, we could live better than we ever had. I could take courses to become a trained technician at the asylum. If only I could borrow the money to keep the policy paid up. No, that was foolish. He could live for years, for many years. Why, why did every door bang shut in my face?

The thought of killing him came to me the second week. If he were to die before the thirty days' grace period, the money would come to us and I vowed never to misuse a penny of it.

I had no talent for scheming, but the obvious idea of tampering with the brake on his wheelchair was inevitable. Each night after

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Mother and I had hoisted him into bed, his chair stood in the hall outside my room. It was easy enough to bring it in and loosen the bolts. I could not tell when they would give way, catapulting him down the steps onto the hard-baked ground beneath. I hoped that I might not be home when it happened and that Mother would be shopping or in the back yard so that someone else would find him.

But since when did any plan of mine go right? Day after day I returned from work and there he sat, his old bottle empty beside him, waiting for a fresh one. And time was running out. Only eight more days. Then seven. Six.

When there were only four, I took matters into my own hands.

That afternoon I handed him his bottle of whiskey. Eagerly he uncapped it to his mouth. Furious, not even looking into the street, I walked behind him, loosed the brake, and sent the chair careening down the steps.

It seemed to me that he lay just right, thrown from the chair, the side of his head in the glass of the broken bottle. I went into the house, put the groceries away, looked through the window and saw Mother out back, gathering green tomatoes, and went out to speak to her and detain her as long as possible. How care-worn she seemed, how sad. Well, things would be better now, I promised silently. We would have peace, a little dignity and kindliness in our lives.

The ringing of the doorbell alerted us. A passer-by had found him. The neighbors called all the proper people—the doctor who pronounced him dead of a broken neck, the police who found "no evidence of foul play."

The stranger came a week after the funeral. He was polite and considerate to Mother and looked at me sharply, I thought. He turned the chair upside down. He ran it back and forth over the floor.

"The screws on the brake got loose now and then. I remember tightening them a few days before it—he—" Mother said. He tested the belts. He looked satisfied.

"You say you ladies were both in the back yard? You didn't hear anything?"

"Nothing," answered Mother.

I was asked to describe for the third time how I came from work, gave him the bottle, passed through the house to the back yard to help my mother gather tomatoes. The ringing of the doorbell had been our first news of the tragedy.

The stranger was an investigator from the insurance company.

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His verdict? Suicide! Amount of insurance money due us? None! Dad's policy had a suicide clause.

It could have been murder, and I could have been put in jail. But it was suicide, so I was only faced with the problem of burial expenses. One thing, I would no longer have to buy whiskey. How many bottles of whiskey would equal the cost of the casket? And the cemetery plot? I began to laugh. I remember that. And I don't remember stopping . . .

It is not so bad here. There are some moments of sadness like the time I saw my mother's face through the glass door. I stretched my hand toward her and she stretched hers to me. Her face was older and not kind any more, so I knew she was angry at me. I beat on the door to get her attention and ask her to forgive me. All this time I had thought she was dead. The stupid nurse put me on report—said I was breaking glass. They put a wooden door there and I couldn't see my mother any more.

Mostly it is pleasant enough. The cubicle is cramped, but it's as much room as I need, and the bed is a proper bed, not a couch. In the winter I have some good talks with the others about the trials I have had. "Miss Done-'er-wrong," murmurs a nurse. It's good to have someone sympathize. And I have to guard my possessions. I stand in front of my place ordering them to stay away from my bed, my chair, and my chest with Mother's picture on it.

In the summer we walk up and down the grounds and sit in chairs under the trees. This is my chair and I have saved this one for you. I told batty old Angie that I saw a garter snake on one of the tree limbs. She went running away like crazy.

Now this is what I want to ask you, Tessie. You have gone on and I think I will be coming there soon. I have these dreams every night now. I know where—a house with a couch to sleep on, no yard, steps where a drunken man stumbles in the night—and a mother whose face is not kind any more. You will be in a finer place beyond the trees. But Tessie, for the sake of the old days, come to me sometimes and put your arm around me and walk with me a little while.

"Q"

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a story of the Twenties by

RAOUL WHITFIELD

We are indebted to Mr. Frank D. McSherry, Jr. for recommending Raoul Whitfield's "Mistral" and for supplying text of the story's original appearance in the December 15, 1931 issue of "Adventure." It is Mr. McSherry's opinion that "Mistral" is superior to the author's Jo Gar series—is, in fact, Whitfield's best short work. The story, according to the author's widow, has never been reprinted and thus had been "lost" for nearly fifty years. To quote Mr. McSherry: "It's a Hemingway-like story of the man with the scar who stays on at Monte Carlo even though he can't stand the mistral, the hot wind that blows for days on end, unceasingly, that rubs nerves raw; and the private dick who wonders about him . . . a story of a gangster's last days, of the wild and roaring Twenties, written in the best 'Black Mask' style" . . .

If you too have a favorite story you haven't reread in years, or if there is a story that has persisted in your memory, let us know the author's name, the title of the story, where and when it first appeared, and we will be happy to pay you a modest finder's fee should we be able to clear the reprint rights . . .

MISTRAL

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

It was the way he ate spaghetti that first attracted my attention. I'd put Remmings on the *Conte Grande*, in a more or less sober condition, and the noon sailing vessel had got away from the Genoa docks. I'd been hungry, and I'd wandered along the dock section looking for a restaurant. The one I'd picked had fooled me; it smelled

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pretty badly and there were thousands of flies. They were persistent and buzzy and they seemed to like Italian food. But the spaghetti was good. As I wound it round my fork I looked around the small, dirty room and saw him. He was eating the stringy stuff, but he was cutting it with a knife. That seemed a bit stiff in Genoa, and after I'd done two plates of it, smothered with a good Parmesan cheese, I looked him over just out of curiosity.

He was big and dark. He had black eyes and a lean face—very lean for his size. It was a hard face, yet there was softness in his eyes. I caught him once when he was inspecting fly specks on the ceiling, and noticed the scar under his chin. His skin was white and the scar stood out pretty clearly. I'd seen knife scars before, and this looked like one. It was long and slightly curved, and a nasty red color. I got the idea that it wasn't a very old scar.

His suit was of gray material, a quiet cloth. It fit him very well. I decided that he wasn't an Italian. He caught me looking at him, and it seemed to make him nervous. The next time I glanced in his direction I caught him watching me without appearing to do so. His hands were nervous and the muscles of his mouth twitched.

While I was drinking terrible coffee I heard him say—

"Damn flies!"

His voice was thick, but without accent. Two boats had come to Genoa that day from the States—a big one and a small one. I decided that he was an American and that he'd just arrived. He paid his check and went past me as I was trying to think in terms of the lira. I smiled a little, and he started to smile. But something changed his mind. He looked worried and frowned, turning his head away from me. He was better than six feet tall and had very broad shoulders, but his body hunched forward when he walked.

I thought about him several times as I drove toward the border town of Ventimiglia. At St. Remo I got my trunks from the rear of the car and had a swim in the Mediterranean. It was around three in the afternoon and the day was hot. I forgot about the scarred one until I'd driven across the border into France and had reached Monte Carlo. Before the Casino I stopped to light a cigarette, and a great yellow machine pulled up. It was of Italian make—a very expensive type of car. The chauffeur was an Italian. And from the rear of the machine my scarred friend descended. He spoke to the chauffeur and didn't see me, and I turned my back as he went into the Casino. I was very curious about him. That fly-filled dock-section eating place, the knifed spaghetti, and his expensive machine—there was

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something strange in the combination.

I followed him into the Casino, and knew at once he had never been there before. He didn't seem to know just what to do, and the ornate reception hall that lay ahead of him didn't offer any solution. I felt that he'd expected to see the gambling tables immediately and he was confused. An attendant approached and spoke to him in French. He merely asked if he could be of service, but the scarred one did not understand.

I was very close to him and I acted on impulse. At his side I smiled.

"You buy an admission ticket in this room on your left," I said, and gestured toward the room with the low counters and the cashiers behind them.

He stared at me with his dark eyes, and then they got very cold. The warmth went from them so suddenly that I started to turn away. But he said—

"Thanks, buddy."

I nodded. Well, I was sure that he was an American and that he didn't speak French and that he was afraid of something. And I was interested. But I knew that showing interest would be about the best way of learning nothing. So I sauntered into the room on my left and reached the *billets de jour* counter. I handed over my passport and ten francs and received the *billet,* after my name and number had been jotted down. It was all done pretty rapidly, and I was turning away when I heard the scarred one say—

"One admission—"

The Frenchman behind the counter smiled and asked for his passport. The scarred one didn't understand, so I said, still helpfully butting in—

"He has to see your passport. Formality here."

The dark eyes widened and his right hand went to the inside pocket of his gray coat. I caught the red color of the passport binding, but that was all. It slipped out of sight again and the scarred one swore.

"Must have left it at home," he muttered in his thickish voice.

That was a pretty bad one. He wasn't giving me credit for having eyes or brains. But I smiled at him.

"You can still get inside," I said. "Give him your name and the name of your villa or hotel. Tell him you're very anxious to make a little play—you feel lucky. Smile at him."

I expected him to say he couldn't speak French, and to ask me if I would help. And I was prepared to tell him that the man behind

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the counter could speak five languages quite well, and English was one of them. But I was fooled. The scarred one smiled at the man behind the counter; he said that he'd left his passport in his hotel, and that he felt lucky and would like to try roulette.

The Casino employee smiled back, said that it was not good to leave one's passport behind, and asked him his name. The scarred one said—

"Tom—Thomas Burke."

I knew he was lying. The man back of the counter continued to smile and asked the hotel and the town where Mr. Burke resided. The scarred one said—

"I stay at Cannes, at the Grand Hotel."

The Grand Hotel was very safe. Practically every French and Italian Riviera town has a Grand Hotel, and I once knew a village that had two for a time. But it happened that the date was August the third, and the Grand Hotel in Cannes had only been open three days. There were very few persons staying there; it did much better in the winter season. The proprietor was a friend of mine; I had been at the hotel for a time the night previous and was quite sure no Thomas Burke was staying there.

The scarred one received his *billet,* which ticket entitled him to play roulette, but not baccarat. I went from the room ahead of him and into the large reception hall. The scarred one halted and lighted a cigarette very popular with Americans. I saw the color of the package reflected in the mirrors about the room. Then I passed into the salon and went to a table that was not too crowded.

The ball fell on red numbers four times in succession. I went to a change booth and bought four thousand-franc oblong chips. Returning to the table, I placed one of the oblongs worth forty dollars on black. The ball rolled against the spin of the wheel, and finally dropped into the groove of a black number. A croupier raked another oblong chip against mine and I picked both of them up and left the table. I had won forty dollars in one play, and that completed *my* particular system for beating the Casino. It was not very often that I won my forty dollars on the first play, but quite often I was one bet ahead of the Casino before I lost my four or five oblongs.

And whenever I was that one bet ahead—I quit. I never attempted to gamble my limited funds against the Casino's almost unlimited ones. And I remembered being told by one of the biggest gamblers of the Riviera that if all those who played at the Casino played as I did, it would be pretty tough for Monte Carlo. It was betting small

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money against big money, betting that the Casino would go broke before they did, that made it easy for the Casino.

As usual, I was pleased. I cashed in my chips and looked around for the scarred one. In the large salon I failed to see him immediately. When I did see him I strolled over to the table where he had seated himself. He had seven or eight hundred dollars' worth of chips before him, and he was playing thousand-franc oblongs on the line between two numbers. He won once while I was watching, and his face was expressionless. The world's greatest gambling casino did not awe him now; he was gambling. And it was easy to see that he was accustomed to gambling.

He won again, just before I left, but he did not smile. The payoff was eighteen oblongs for his one. Seven hundred and twenty dollars. And it was his second eighteen-for-one win in several minutes.

Outside the Casino I stood for some seconds and thought about the passport I'd seen. I decided that the scarred one was a crook and did not care to take a chance.

Either the passport he had was a bad one and he didn't wish it to get in Monte Carlo records, or it was a good one and he was afraid of a leak somewhere. Or he was afraid of something that might happen in the future, and a checking up at the Casiono might follow.

Showing a passport at the border was something else again. And there was just the barest possibility that my scarred friend was a big shot, and might have been recognized and not allowed to play. That has happened at Monte Carlo. The Casino authorities are very careful about some details, and, as everyone knows, they are very careless about others.

I forgot about him while driving the Grand Corniche. The day was very hot; there was not a breath of wind. At Nice I stopped at the Frigate bar for a champagne cocktail, and at a little beach between Nice and Cannes I got damp trunks from the rear of my small car and had another swim. Then I drove on again, wondering if Remmings on the way back home from Genoa were sober yet. I decided that he probably was not.

It was a bit cooler when I drove round that point of land to the east of Cannes. The town lay in a semicircle; the waterfront was crescent-shaped before me. On the far side were the Esterel Mountains coming down to the sea. It was a nice sight. A harsh horn from behind caused me to pull to the right of the road along the Croisette, and with a rush and another burst from its horn, a great yellow machine went past. I recognized the machine and the chauffeur, and

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caught a glimpse of the scarred man in the rear seat. He was grinning broadly, and I guessed that he'd won quite a bit. But why hadn't he stayed on, playing his winning streak to the limit?

The Grand Hotel was along the Croisette a distance beyond the spot where I should have turned off to my small hotel. But I didn't turn off. I drove on slowly, and a square or so from the Grand I passed the big yellow machine, moving slowly. The chauffeur was grinning.

I sat in the car near the Grand and smoked a cigarette. When I went inside there was no sign of the scarred one, but my friend the proprietor was about. We went into his little office and talked about other things and then about the scarred one. Yes, he'd arrived. Traveling very light in a hired car. Just two bags, without many seals. His name was Anthony Senna; he was from New Orleans, in America. He had a room with bath, but not facing the Mediterranean.

I raised my eyebrows and my friend smiled at me.

"It was not a matter of money, I think," he said. "It was a matter of wind."

"Wind?"

My friend the proprietor nodded.

"Monsieur Senna, he does not like the wind," he explained. "It keeps him awake of nights, it annoys him. And when there is a mistral, as you know, there is wind. Much wind."

There was certainly much wind when there was a mistral. For three or six, and on rare occasions for nine days there was the wind. It blew straight in from the Mediterranean, out of a cloudless sky. It spread sand all over the Croisette—the curving road along the beach, with the fashionable bars and shops. It ripped awnings and sent smart yachts behind the concrete seawall to the tiny harbor. It battered ten-foot waves over the sand, and the spray from them was salty on your lips, a square from the Croisette. And all the time the sky was blue.

And the scarred one who had stated in Monte Carlo that his name was Thomas Burke, and in Cannes that it was Anthony Senna, did not like the wind. This one who had cold eyes when spoken to, and who cut spaghetti with a knife in a dirty waterfront eating place in Genoa, and who played thousand-franc chips at Monte Carlo—the wind kept him awake at night.

"He stays here for some little time?" I asked my friend.

The proprietor shrugged.

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"On the Riviera, who can tell how long one stays?" he countered. "But I have given him a room on the top floor, on the corner facing the rear."

"On the *corner* facing the rear?" I repeated, puzzled.

I said that because one of the peculiar things about top-floor corner rooms at the Grand was that they had only the two windows at the rear. There was no side window. And there was no room next to them, but rather very large linen closets. The rooms were apt to be hot at this time—very hot.

The proprietor nodded, and I said—

"I suppose he looked at some other rooms?"

My friend seemed a little surprised at my interest. But then we talked often of unimportant things—of things that seemed unimportant to us, and yet very important to others.

"Monsieur Senna looked at several rooms and selected the one at the east corner," the proprietor told me.

"Well, in event of a mistral, he will hear only a little wind there," I said.

And my friend agreed—

"The walls are very thick, and the window screens quite tight. He will hear only a little of the mistral."

A telegram from Paris took me to St. Raphael the next day. I was searching for a German by the name of Schmidt, who had stolen many marks from a small-town bank somewhere near Berlin, and who the Paris office of the agency with which I was connected had heard was in the French Riviera town. The office had heard incorrectly, though the Schmidt at St. Raphael slightly resembled the German thief. He was a good fellow, this Schmidt, and after we had stood each other a few rounds of drinks I left him and drove over the Esterel Mountains toward Cannes. It had started to blow, and when I took my machine over the highest stretch of road, with the Mediterranean almost a thousand feet below, the car rocked from the gusts of wind.

"Mistral," I said. "The beginning of one."

And I thought about my friend with the scar on his chin and the warm eyes that got so suddenly cold. I drove pretty fast and reached Cannes around four. The wind was increasing; awnings were being hauled in and yachts were steaming into the small harbor, behind the concrete breakwater. Sand was swirling in eddies across the Croisette. The two most patronized of the beach bars, the Miramar

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and the Chatham, were deserted—it was three hours before cocktail time.

I went to my hotel and got the file that held my photographs. It was a big file in a special case, and I'd gone over two hundred photos the night before. I did another fifty and then quit. In the fingers of my right hand I held the likeness of the scarred one. The scar was missing, and the big one was wearing his hair differently. But he was my man. I turned the photo over and read:

> Anthony (Tony) Senna. Chicago, September 1926. Jackie Marks' bodyguard until Marks was machine-gunned out, in March 1927. Murder suspect. Indicted three times—no convictions. Beer. Mixed up in Samuel Tracy kill. Not indicted. Dropped out of sight for year in early 1928. Turned up in Los Angeles on gambling barge in June 1930, after standing trial for murder of copper in Chicago in February 1929. Al Fess murdered on barge three months later. Senna stood trial for murder. No conviction. Used plenty of money to get clear. No record after this.

There was a description of the scarred one that did the trick. I guessed that he'd got heavier, was wearing his hair differently, and was only using that Senna tag when he was forced to. He knew that there was the *carte d'identité* business, probably, and that the local police would have his name from the hotel. I decided that his passport was all right, but that he hadn't wanted Senna to get into Monte Carlo records. He'd played safe at the Grand, fearing the police, in event of any sort of accident, might check his passport.

Well, I knew who he was. And I remembered that Al Fess had been a big shot in Chicago, but had been driven out by Capone and had followed Horace Greeley's advice to go West. He'd worked the big gambling barge beyond the three-mile limit, and then things had started to go wrong. I remembered that the barge had been blown up once, and set on fire another time. And not long after that Fess had been shot to death. My scarred one had been indicted and tried. No conviction. That trial would have taken place along in September or October, I figured. About a year ago.

I shoved the photo back in its proper file and smoked a couple of cigarettes. The wind was cutting up now, but I didn't mind it. The screens in my room's three windows rattled, and something loose on a cornice somewhere made a pounding noise at intervals. I

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thought of the room Senna had selected and smiled a little grimly.

The theory I liked best was that Senna had murdered Al Fess a year ago. He'd kept out of sight for a while after his trial. Fess had been pretty big. Perhaps Senna had tried to move around a bit in the States. But it had been too tough. So he'd come across and had landed at Genoa. But he was still worried. He liked rooms with thick walls and without other rooms next to them. He liked them on the top floor. He was lonely and in a strange country, but he was afraid of strangers. In other words, Tony Senna must be a hunted man.

After a little while I had a swim in a sea that was getting rougher by the minute. The waves were three and four feet high and, in the manner of the Mediterranean, they pounded to shore very close to each other. When I got back to the hotel after my swim the mistral was still picking up force. I changed into light flannels and slipped a Colt automatic into a deep hip pocket of the trousers. I couldn't quite make up my mind about what I wanted to do with Senna. That is, whether I wanted to talk with him, or try to talk with him. Just out of curiosity—for he wasn't wanted.

A chasseur brought in another telegram. After he'd taken my franc tip and had gone, I read it. It was coded simply—from the Paris office. I was to forget about Schmidt for the time. A client in Paris was very anxious to locate one Anthony Senna, who it was thought had landed in Genoa the day before. There was a description of Senna in code, and it included the scar. I was to locate Senna and wire the office. That was all. Except that there were the letters V.I., which meant "very important."

I smoked another cigarette and smiled at the break putting Remmings on the *Conte Grande* had got me. And I felt a little sorry for Senna. My hunch was that Senna hadn't come far enough away, or that he'd come to the wrong place. In any case, business was business. I went to the French telegraph and sent a coded wire to Paris. It was to the effect that one Anthony Senna who answered the required description was staying at the Grand Hotel at Cannes, France.

When I thought of the surprise this speed would cause, in Paris, I decided I rated a drink or two. So I drove against a rising wind and parked near the Chatham. Senna wasn't there. It was after seven and the bar was crowded. The pajamas the women wore were as colorful as usual but had long ceased to startle me. I went

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outside, having trouble getting the door opened against the mistral wind, and went inside the Miramar.

At first I didn't see my man. This bar was larger and noisier and more crowded. I went toward a small table in a far, dark corner. And then I saw Tony Senna. He was slouched low in one of the big lounging chairs. His big body was slumped, his arms were at his sides. From where he sat he had a view of the whole bar and of the entrance. On the table before him was a glass of beer. His face was twisted; he looked miserable.

When he caught sight of me he straightened a little. He started to smile. I waved a hand carelessly and watched the hard expression come into his eyes. But it went away, and he sort of grinned. He hesitated, than said thickly—

"Alone—have a drink?"

I hesitated. Being an agency man has its Judas moments. This was one of them. I'd sold this man out, and he was asking me to drink with him. I said—

"All right—sure."

I dropped into the lounge chair across the table from him, leaned forward.

"My name's Benn," I said, lying because I knew he would lie. And he did.

"Mine's Burke," he replied. "Tom Burke. Thanks for that tip at the Casino. I was kinda worried in there and maybe I didn't act right with you."

I waved that off. A gust of the mistral wind made things sing and rattle outside. The big one shivered.

"Mistral," I said pleasantly. "Just getting into action."

He swore—

"Hate wind. Gets me. Mistral, eh? What in hell's that?"

I ordered a whisky sour.

"Just wind," I told him. "If it's a real mistral it'll last three days, or six—or nine. The nines are pretty rare."

He sat up straight and blinked at me.

"Like *this*—for nine days!" he muttered. "Lord. I'd go crazy."

I nodded.

"Some people do," I said. "There's a sort of unwritten French law—it applies to men and women living together. If one of them murders the other along about the eighth or ninth day, it doesn't count."

Senna stared at me.

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"No kiddin'?" he muttered.

"That's what they say—pretty hard to convict in such a case. The wind gets at you after four or five days. I've never seen a nine-day affair, but I've been around for a couple of the six-day sessions."

He muttered something I didn't catch and sipped his beer. Every few seconds he'd look toward the entrance, and his dark eyes were sharp. No one came in unless he saw him. I thought of the wire I'd just sent, and felt strange about it. The agency game can give you lousy moments.

When the waiter came with my whisky sour I lifted it slowly and said cheerfully—

"Here's to crime!"

He grinned at that and raised his beer glass. I frowned at it.

"Beer's no good here," I told him. "It's a waste of time."

And he said a little grimly, without thinking too much—

"Yeah, but it doesn't hurt my eyes or nerves any."

There was something about the scarred one I liked. I didn't bother figuring just what it was. Perhaps I felt a little sorry for him. I had a very strong hunch that death was coming his way. His actions didn't hurt my hunch any. He wasn't exactly scared, but he was nervous. I wanted to know something, so I went after it.

"You haven't been over here long, have you?" I asked, and didn't make my voice too anxious.

He looked at me narrowly.

"I'm an engineer," he said. "I've been down in Mexico—alone a lot. Had a couple of months leave due me, and grabbed a freighter for Genoa. Just an idea."

I nodded. I didn't believe that he was an engineer, but I did believe that he'd been in Mexico and that he'd been there alone. He was fed up, and he'd picked the Riviera and Cannes. And it hadn't worked. And he was drinking with the man who had spotted him, turned his name up.

There was a crash of glass somewhere beyond the bar. The entrance door opened and a group of people came in, laughing and letting the wind carry them along. Senna hunched down in the chair again.

"I hate wind," he muttered. "I gotta get out of this town."

I thought of my wire and didn't like that idea. So I said—

"It'll be blowing all along the Riviera. And you'd have to go pretty far back in the mountains to dodge this breeze. You can't be sure—it may not stick. Tomorrow you may not feel a breath of wind."

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That was an ironic thought. A fast plane could reach Cannes from Paris in five hours. The regular planes did it in six. If someone wanted to see Senna badly enough, if I wasn't going haywire on my hunches, someone could be at the Grand Hotel around midnight. A good plane could edge into the wind and get down here all right.

Senna said—

"You think it may let up, eh?"

I nodded, and finished my whisky sour.

"Sure," I said. "Have one on me?"

He had another beer, and I had another sour. I tried to get him to open up a little, but he didn't want to talk. He kept his eyes on the entrance door and on human faces that passed near our corner. I said—

"You played at the Casino—any luck?"

He grinned, showing white teeth. Then his dark eyes got hard and frowning.

"Yeah—too much, maybe," he stated.

I looked puzzled.

"Too much?" I said.

He got sort of a silly smile on his face, only it wasn't all the way silly.

After a few seconds of silence he said a little grimly—

"I've only been this lucky a few times in my life. And right after those times I got unlucky. You know how it is."

I finished my second sour and rose.

"Yes, sure," I said. "I know how it is. See you again."

He didn't seem surprised at the abruptness of my departure.

"Yeah," he said. "So long."

I went out into the wind, got to a phone in the Miramar Hotel and called the office of the small flying field at the end of town. I was known there as Jay Benn, and sometimes I used a ship for a fast hop to Germany or Switzerland or Spain. In Cannes I was thought to be a pretty good American, with enough money but not too much. A fellow who liked that section of the coast.

I got Leon Demoigne on the phone and asked him to ring me if a plane landed around midnight. He said he would if I wanted him to, but that he could tell me now that one was coming down from Paris. She was a fast monoplane, and there would be two passengers aboard besides her pilot. I told him that wasn't the plane I was thinking about, and he said he'd advised by wire against the flight, but that the ship was apparently coming along anyway. He ended

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up by saying it was probably bringing along a couple of crazy Americans who had heavy dates.

Even in French his idea didn't sound right to me. I thought it was perfectly right that the plane was bringing along a couple of Americans. But I was quite certain they weren't coming because of the kind of heavy dates Leon anticipated. And I was damned sure they weren't crazy.

I had dinner alone at a small Russian restaurant, and the black bread didn't taste as good as usual. The thing that got me was that I was pretty sure Tony Senna wasn't wanted by the police. I was pretty sure that crooks were using a reputable agency, as they had used agencies before, to trace another crook. I had the feeling that I'd put Senna on the spot, and I didn't like it. He was a killer and probably a lot of things that went with it, but it seemed to me he wasn't going to have much of a chance. I could almost hear guns—and I could almost see the big scarred man going down. I might be all wrong, but the set-up framed things that way.

At ten o'clock I went back to the hotel and found the telegram I expected. It was from McKee, the agency head, and it was brief. It read, "Fine fast work clients pleased drop further investigation of Senna." It was in code. And it convinced me that death was coming close to the big fellow. I was to drop out, which was not the ordinary method. The clients would handle things themselves. And they were pleased.

I lay on my bed and listened to the mistral wind howl. It was getting on my nerves too. After a half hour or so I made a decision. Business was business, but some of it took away too much self-respect. I drove to the Grand Hotel. Senna was not in. When I got to the Miramar bar he was just where I'd left him. He'd been eating sandwiches, and he was still drinking beer. He grinned at me.

"I couldn't go out in that stuff," he said. "So I just stuck here."

I nodded and pulled a chair close to him. I ordered coffee and *fin*. He was looking at me with his dark eyes narrowed.

"Damn mistral!" he muttered. "You think it'll last three days, maybe six?"

I said—

"You never can tell." Then I went right into it. "Listen, Senna," I said softly and without paying any attention to his start of surprise, "you got a tough break in Genoa. I happened to eat in the same spot and see you. I saw your passport edge at the Casino in Monte Carlo,

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and I know some things. My name isn't Benn—and I'm connected with an international detective agency. My office wired me to look for you, and I wired back that you were at the Grand Hotel here. Two Americans are coming down by plane—clients of the Paris office of my agency. They're coming down to see you, and they'll get here about midnight. It took me a little while to figure things out, and when I got them figured out I decided that you were being spotted out for killing Al Fess on his gambling barge off Santa Monica. I didn't like my part, so I'm warning you. That's all of it."

His big hands were gripping the table edge, and getting white with that grip. His dark eyes were slitted and cold. I kept my right hand on the Colt grip.

"I don't think you're the whitest guy that ever lived, Senna," I said. "And I've got my hand on a rod now. So don't do the wrong thing. What I want to get across is that my hunch is the law isn't coming after you. Not *my* kind of law. You've got a couple of hours, and you don't like wind. *I'm* all right, because I wired you were staying at the Grand, and you were. You can hire a—"

I stopped. Senna had taken his whitened knuckles away from the table. He was relaxed in the big chair, and his face held a terrible grin. He chuckled. I stared at him and he shook his head slowly.

"Lord," he breathed. "Imagine a dick tipping me off! Imagine that!"

I smiled a little. But I didn't say anything. He kept on shaking his head. After awhile he lighted a cigarette.

"I wouldn't waste too much time, Senna," I told him. "This wind may not hold up that plane too much."

He shook his big head.

"I ain't going away, Benn—or whatever your name is," he said slowly, tonelessly. "I've been leaving places for a long time now. Going places—far places. Spots I didn't like. They've been after me a long time. I ain't saying I did for Fess, but if ever a guy rated a dose of lead, that rat did, see? But me, I'm staying here."

"Don't be a fool, Senna," I said. "The law doesn't want you—"

He looked suddenly tired.

"These guys are worse than the law, Benn," he said wearily. "I tell you, I'm tired of running away. I'm staying here. Now you—" he raised a big forefinger and pointed it at me "—get the hell out of here!"

I said as I rose slowly—

"Well, I warned you. I may be all wrong—but I tipped you, Senna."

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There was irony in his eyes.

"Sure, Benn," he said. "Now you get the hell away from me."

The plane landed at 12:10 by my wristwatch. It landed in a nasty wind, after circling the lighted field three times. She was a small monoplane, cabin type. I had my car on the Frejus road with the lights out. After about ten minutes, a car that had been waiting at the field turned into the main road and moved toward Cannes. I had to drive very fast to follow it. I was several squares behind when it reached the Grand Hotel. The wind was raising the devil with the palms along the Croisette; it seemed to be steadily increasing.

I parked a square away and went into the hotel by a side entrance. When I reached the main lobby no one was about but the *concierge*. He knew me. He said that the two gentlemen had said they didn't want Monsieur Senna disturbed, but was he in his room? And he said that he had told them that Monsieur Senna was at the Blue Frog. And they had thanked him and departed. They had not engaged rooms and they had not brought any baggage into the hotel.

"How do you know Monsieur Senna is at the Blue Frog?" I asked.

The *concierge* shrugged.

"He has told me that he thought he would go there," he returned. "He has asked me for a quiet place to drink, where there is music and yet not a crowd. And where the lights would not hurt his eyes."

"C'est ça," I muttered grimly.

Well, it *was* so. The Blue Frog was a small drinking and dancing place; there was a two-piece orchestra and the lights were dim. It was not smart and it didn't get much of a crowd. I reflected that dim lights would give Senna a better chance, and that a small crowd would mean less chance of humans other than those concerned being hit by stray bullets. I wasn't sure that Senna cared much about other humans, but every man has his particular code of what he calls honor. Senna was no exception.

The Blue Frog was just off the Route d'Antibe, the main business street of Cannes, at the east end of town. It was set back in some palms and there were no buildings very close to it. In my car I drove fast, parked a half square away, and hurried on. I went in a side entrance and spotted Senna right away. His eyes were narrowed on mine and he was smiling. He wasn't slumped in any lounging chair this time. He sat on a small wooden chair. It had no arms. Both hands were in the pockets of his light suit coat, and he was seated slightly to the left of the table. He faced the side entrance directly,

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and the main entrance to the place was in a line with his big body.

I stood for several seconds looking at him. Then I went to the bar. I ordered Scotch, straight. The two-piece orchestra was playing "Ay-yi-yi," with the guitar dominating the piano. There were only a few people inside; mistrals kept folk at home.

And that was good, too.

When I lifted my drink, my fingers were shaking a little. There was a mirror beyond the bar, and I looked into it. I could see the front entrance. The barman saw my shaking fingers and guessed wrong. He said that the mistral was not good, it did bad things with one's nerves. I agreed and downed the Scotch. As I set the glass on the counter my eyes went to the mirror, and I saw a tall, hard-faced man come in. I turned and looked toward the side entrance. A shorter, heavier man stepped inside the dimly lighted room, letting a rush of wind in with him. A girl laughed shrilly, and the orchestra continued its swift rhythm.

I think they both saw Senna at the same instant. With so few people in the place that wasn't hard. I saw the shorter one of the two stiffen, and his coat material came up from the bottom. There were two terrific crashes. No Maxim silenced guns, these. There were screams. The short one took one step forward and crashed to the floor.

I swung around and stared at Senna. There was another gun crash and his big body jerked. But his right hand came up. His left battered the table aside and he walked toward the main entrance and toward the tall hard-faced man. There was another gun crash and Senna's left arm hung limp at his side. His gun was up, extended in his right hand. He kept walking, his face twisted in a terrible smile. The tall one was staring at him; he fired again but the bullet went wild. It tore artificial flowers from a wall behind Senna.

And then Senna worked his gun. It crashed again and again. I counted four shots, and then all sound was merged into a terrible roar. When the roar died away, I went toward the two motionless figures on the floor near the door. The tall one was dead. Senna was alive; he said weakly, as I leaned over him—

"The others—done?"

I left him and went to the side entrance door. The thick-set one was dead, too. The bullet had ripped upward through his mouth. I went back and kneeled beside Senna—

"Both done," I told him.

He tried to grin, but it was too tough. He said, very weakly—

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"Sure—I got—Al Fess." And a few seconds later he said, "Guy—I can't hear—that damn wind—"

"Take it easy, Senna—"

I couldn't think of anything else to say. He closed his eyes and after a few seconds more he said weakly—

"Funny—if it hadn't been for that damn wind—I might have—run again. But it just—made me sore—made me want to—stick here—"

He didn't say any more. He was dead when a very excited gendarme reached my side and asked a dozen questions one after another. I answered one of them and went to the bar for another drink. It was some time before I got it. As I sipped it I decided that it was just as well Senna had had a funny idea about the wind, if he *had* had it. You can't always be running away from things.

The mistral lasted three days, and when it was over the sun was very hot.

The Blue Frog did a big business; the proprietor put a frame around a hole made by one of the bullets that missed Senna. The smart crowd went in for a look, and the French townspeople went in, too. The proprietor told me he would have liked to frame one of Tony Senna's bullets, but that couldn't be done. Senna hadn't missed.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 576th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . No one should ever separate kids from their dogs—it's a Law of Nature. If you break that law, you may change poetic justice to canine justice . . .

The author, Mark S. Joy, was 26 years old when he submitted his first story. He serves as the minister for a small church in Mooreland, Oklahoma. He has sold several nonfiction articles to outdoor magazines, and some of his hobbies are reflected in his writing—birdwatching, hunting and fishing, wood carving, and model railroading . . .

OF DOGS AND MEN

by MARK S. JOY

I suppose I'd have to admit that I never did like Harry Everson, even from the first time I met him early last fall out at Frank Adkins' place. I was passing Frank's farmstead after checking some of our power lines out near the river; I work for the local utility company. It was hot and dusty, so I thought I'd stop for a drink from the well in Frank's front yard, where the water was always good and cold.

Frank was there, underneath his old pickup tinkering with something. He told me to help myself to the water. Like he said, it seemed like something was always going wrong around his place. It did appear that Frank had more than his share of hard luck. The place he tried to farm just wasn't too good for farming—rough and rocky hill country in the Kiamichi mountains of eastern Oklahoma. He grew a few crops here and there where the land was level enough, and ran some hogs and cattle on the rest. But the old farm had been going downhill long before he had gotten a hold of it, and even though he and his wife and kids were all good hard workers, you

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couldn't really say they'd turned the place around yet.

But if Frank wasn't exactly an expert farmer; there was one thing for which his expertise was known far and wide. The man just had some kind of gift for working with dogs. Around these parts, quail hunting was pretty popular, and anyone would tell you that if you were looking to buy a good bird dog, or had a pup you wanted trained, the man to see was Frank Adkins.

Frank rolled out from under his pickup, and we sat down in the shade on the porch steps for a few minutes. Naturally, the conversation headed towards dogs pretty quick. I had noticed that his pens were empty, and the only dog I could see was a little lemon-and-white Brittany spaniel running around in the yard.

"Where's all your dogs, Frank?" I asked.

"Well, I've done pretty good selling them this year. Quail season ain't quite here yet, and I've already sold all I had to sell. Came out pretty good on the money, too, but I swear I don't know where it all goes. The wife was in the hospital some this summer, and now who knows what this pickup will end up costing me before I get it back on the road."

While we sat there, the little spaniel wandered up to me, wanting her ears scratched. As I was fooling around with her, I asked, "What's this one's name, Frank?"

"That's Ginger, or at least that's what the kids call her. She'd probably make a fine dog, but I'm not going to sell her. Them kids have gotten awfully attached to her. You knew that old dog Annie they had, didn't you? Well, Annie died last spring about the time this little pup was born. She was just a cute little pup about the time when the kids needed something to keep their mind off losing Annie. I tried to tell them not to get so set on this pup. I told them I might have to sell her, but we'd get them another pet. But you know how it is with kids and dogs. I've just decided I'd better keep her for them. I've never even had her tail bobbed. Most of the guys who buy a Brittany want that long tail bobbed."

The pup soon ran off and was romping around the yard with the kids. I could see what Frank meant—those kids really were attached to that dog. I'd decided I'd wasted enough of the company's time, so I was about ready to leave when a station wagon started up the drive. I hung around a little more, and the driver turned out to be Harry Everson, who was new in our area. He'd recently moved out here from Tulsa and bought out a local real-estate business. I'd heard he was doing pretty good, even though he was new and all.

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He told Frank he was looking for a good bird dog.

"Well," Frank said, "I wish I could help you, but I just don't have any for sale. I had real good luck selling my dogs this year, and they're all gone. I even sold the breeding stock I had around, so as soon as I get on my feet a little, I'll be looking for some dogs myself."

"What about this one?" Everson said, stooping down to pick up the little Brittany playing at his feet.

"Oh, she's not for sale. That's the kids' pet. They've got pretty attached to that pup."

Everson frowned. "She looks like she'll make a fine dog. I'll give you what she's worth."

Frank shook his head. "No, really, Mr. Everson, that dog's not for sale."

But Everson wasn't going to give up. "What do you usually get for a pup?"

"About $200 for a good pup, started and broke a little. Next spring I'll probably have several."

"What good will that do me this fall? Look, a lot of these city boys come out here looking for a little farm—doctors, lawyers—fellas with a lot of money. If I could take them hunting on the places that have a lot of quail, it might help me clinch a deal. I need a good dog, and I need it right away."

I interrupted. "Did you check with Tom Nelson? He might still have some good pups."

Everson kind of glared at me. "Why should I go all over the county looking for a dog when I've found a good one right here? Now, Frank, I'll give you $250 for this one, right now."

Frank persisted in telling him she wasn't for sale, but I thought his resolve would eventually weaken. It seemed like the more he told Everson no, the more determined Everson was to buy that dog.

"Frank, here's $300. Take the extra money and buy them kids another dog." He had a real big heart. The Adkins kids were all standing around, quiet but keeping their distance. Frank looked at them, but didn't say anything. I could kind of see the handwriting on the wall, so I decided to head out. I figured Frank would just about have to take that offer. I couldn't really blame him. He'd hate to disappoint them kids, but a lot of that money would be putting shoes on their feet and food on the table. Still, I thought it was pretty low of Everson to push him so hard about selling the dog.

I heard in town a few days later that my hunch had been right. Everson kept waving that $300 in cash around, and Frank just

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couldn't afford to turn him down. Well, I didn't like it but I more or less forgot about it. Maybe Everson was right—them kids would get attached to any old dog that Frank could pick up free somewhere.

Quail season rolled around, and the talk at the café often turned to hunting. I didn't do too much hunting myself, but I joined in the talk. One day I ran into Joe Selman about noon. Joe ran a farm out north of town for some absentee owners. The owners had decided to sell the place, and it was listed with Harry Everson's agency.

"He brought some clients out hunting on the place last week," Joe told me. "I bet they got a laugh out of Harry."

"What happened?"

"Oh, he had this little dog he's been bragging about, and it hunted all right for about thirty minutes, but as soon as it got out of sight, we never saw it again."

"Was it that one he bought from Frank Adkins?"

"Yeah. Harry was calling it Sally, but when she wouldn't pay any attention to him sometimes, he'd call her Ginger. He said he'd changed the name after he got her, and maybe she was confused."

I couldn't help but smile about it all. It seemed like kind of poetic justice to me.

We heard a lot more about Harry Everson's lost dog that week, because when the weekly paper came out, there was an ad offering a $200 reward for the return of the dog. If he ever got that dog back, Everson was going to have $500 wrapped up in a dog that didn't seem to like him too well. I was kind of hoping it might turn out like a "Lassie Come Home" story, and the dog would turn up out at Frank Adkins' place.

We had a bad windstorm the last week in November, and we had a lot of lines down all over the county. We got service restored in good order, but we had a lot of brush to clean up along our right of way. I'd worked a little overtime one evening clearing up the last little bit on some lines out in the hill country, and it was getting dark by the time I got back to the truck. When I started to pull out, my headlights picked up a flash of color back in the brush, and in a few seconds a dog came out into the open. It was Ginger.

By this time she'd been lost about three weeks, and Everson was getting even more impatient to recover her. His ads were in the paper every week, and were also running every day in the daily paper over in the county seat. A lot of people were interested in that reward.

The dog looked like it was in pretty good shape, but when I looked

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closer I noticed that her tail was broken. I thought she must have gotten hit by a car, because I couldn't imagine any other way that the tail might have got broken.

I wasn't too interested in Everson's $200 reward. After I got home I tried to clean the pup up a bit and I gave her some raw hamburger and a bowl of milk. After I'd cleaned up and had some supper, I put the dog in my pickup and headed for Frank Adkins' place.

Outside, where the kids couldn't hear, I told Frank that I had the dog, and I wanted his kids to have her back. I hadn't really expected Frank's reaction, but I guess I hadn't thought things through very well.

"I appreciate your feelings," Frank said, "but I just can't take that dog back. The kids would sure like it, but it wouldn't work out. Everson has already been here once, thinking she might have found her way back out here. He'll probably be checking again. I didn't want to have to sell her to him, but he paid for her, so I can't take her back."

I knew Frank was right, at least about giving the dog back to him. Somebody would surely be asking questions sometime, even if Everson himself didn't come back. But I still didn't want to just give her back to Everson. I asked Frank if he'd mind forgetting I even had the dog.

"I just said I couldn't take her back," Frank replied, "but I'm not too crazy about Everson either. You do whatever you want with the dog."

The first thing I did the next morning was to have something done about that broken tail. I drove quite a ways to a vet over in the next county. I didn't want to go to the local vet because a lot of people were still looking for that reward money. The vet told me that the best thing to do was just go ahead and bob the tail. I left her there and said I'd pick her up the next day.

When I got Ginger back the next day, I was pleased to see that she looked quite a bit different with the bobbed tail. Since it had to be done anyway, it would fit in pretty well with a plan that was germinating in my mind.

I headed out to Charlie Watson's place after I left the vet's. Charlie is over 70 years old, but I knew from experience that he could outwalk me through the trails in the nearby hills. He was about as near to an old-time mountaineer as anybody I knew. I had read somewhere that back in the old west some rustlers knew how to make a dye that would change the markings on horses. I didn't

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know if that was true, but if it was, I figured Charlie would be the man who would know about it.

I explained the whole deal to Charlie. I knew I'd have to, because he wouldn't want to be mixed up with a stolen dog. I assured him it wasn't stolen, and that eventually I intended to return it to its rightful owner. Just as I had, Charlie thought it was pretty low of Everson to take that dog away from Frank's kids. He knew a man who might be able to do something, so I left the dog with Charlie and said I'd check back in a couple of days.

I never did know who Charlie's friend was, and I don't know what he did, but when I picked up Ginger you'd never have known it was the same dog. Since the vet had bobbed the tail, and Charlie's friend had done his tricks, the effect was striking. Where Ginger had been lemon-and-white, she was now liver-and-white, and even had a few new small spots. Charlie said that when she started to shed next summer, her new coat would probably grow back in her natural color, but I didn't worry about that.

Quail season had a few weeks to run, so I still had time to work things out. Harry Everson finally quit running his ads, but he let it be known that he still wanted that dog back awfully bad. I ran into Harry in town one day and asked him if he'd been hunting lately.

"I haven't hunted much since I lost my dog," he told me.

"Why don't you come with me?" I asked. "I just bought a new dog over in Arkansas, and I haven't got to try her out around here yet."

Harry was eager to go, and we arranged all the details. He knew of a place where we could go, a farm he was trying to sell.

I picked Harry up the next morning and we headed out. I tried to prime him a little bit by telling him that I didn't really hunt much any more. I told him I'd been offered such a good deal on this dog that I just bought it with the idea of using it the rest of this season and then selling it for a good profit.

Just as I hoped, Ginger hunted superbly. I told Everson the dog's name was Billy Jean, but I just called her "Girl" most of the time while he was around, because I didn't want to confuse the pup. She'd had three names so far. I knew she was out of good stock, and she was just a natural at what she was doing. Before too long Harry took the bait.

"How much would you have to have for that dog?" he asked.

"Well, Harry, I'm not really ready to sell her yet. Besides, I've kind of promised someone else first chance when I am ready to sell."

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"Whatever they offered you, I'll better it. I lost a good dog last fall, you know. I sure want another one, and this is a good one."

I guess I could never be a professional con man, because when he said that about losing a good dog, I about busted out laughing. Luckily I kept myself under control. But I knew I had Everson on the hook. Just like that day in Frank's front yard, telling Harry no just seemed to make him want it all the more. He seemed to want to impress on everyone that his money could get his way. "Just name your price," he told me.

"Well, I said I got her at a bargain, but she's still a high-priced dog. With the right papers she'd be worth a lot more, but I'd have to get at least $400."

"What do I need with a pedigree to tell me what I can plainly see?" Everson said. "Anybody can see that dog came out of good hunting stock. When we get back to town I'll write you a check for $400."

"I don't know what I'll tell the guy I spoke to before," I said.

Harry laughed. "Tell him money talks!"

The pup flushed a small covey and neither one of us could hit anything, so we called it quits. On the way back to town Harry was congratulating us both on such a good deal. When we got back to his office, he wrote me a check for $400, thanking me profusely.

Leaving his place and literally laughing all the way to the bank, I did begin to have some second thoughts about what I'd done. But I still didn't like Harry Everson, and after all, he wanted his dog back so bad. When I pictured those kids standing in Frank's yard crying as the dog went away in the back of the station wagon, I knew Harry was really the slob I had made him out to be.

Coming out of the bank, I put two one-hundred-dollar bills in an envelope addressed to Frank Adkins. I kept two hundred for myself, which was the reward, and after all I had returned the dog. Outside of worrying a bit about whether the dog would have a good home, I didn't really feel too bad about selling Harry Everson his own dog for $400.

Besides, there was a good chance, I thought, that Ginger would find her way back to Adkins' kids, and Everson wouldn't dream of looking for his new dog at the Adkins place.

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Every professional writer is always on the alert to find new plot ideas, especially gleams out of real life. Here is a mystery writer probing and poking for the seed of a plot, and coming up with one of the most chilling concepts we've ever encountered . . . a gem of a story . . .

ALL THE HIPPIES ARE DEAD

by ROBERT TWOHY

"Ellie's folks had sent her some money and she wanted an old-fashioned Thanksgiving. She bought a big turkey and a lot of wine, and we invited people from the Stoned Snake, which was the place we hung out. But all we had in the house were some piddly little knives, so I went to the five-and-dime and got a fairly good carving knife, which did a nice job on the bird. It was a good party, good dope, no crazy stuff, everyone stayed mellow—Ellie was really happy.

"Next Saturday night I cut her throat, stabbed her six times in the chest, and left the knife sticking there.

"Tuesday morning Otis, who with another guy and a girl lived in our cottage—it was Ellie's and my rental, and we had the bedroom, the others crashed in the living room—Otis opened the bedroom door and saw her lying there in bed, and a little later the cops came.

"I was out of town. I'd gone off with a guy in his camper early Sunday, and we drove around and slept on beaches, drank a lot of beer . . . Somewhere the camper got totaled and I wound up in the hospital in San Luis, cuts and bruises but no broken bones. The guy I was with, I asked about him but nobody in the hospital knew. He'd walked away from the wreck, or got killed, or something—I never

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did find out about him. His name was Locko, or Lago, something like that.

"I hitched back to Lindenvale and first thing I did was go to the Stoned Snake, and some guys I knew were there and they asked, where'd I been hiding?

"I said I'd been in San Luis and they said the cops were looking for me. I asked why and they said I knew why. I said I didn't and they said, because of Ellie's murder.

"I went completely nuts and they got me cooled down some. I yelled, who the hell would kill Ellie? And they said, you did. And I said, that's crazy, I loved Ellie.

"But it seems my fingerprints were all over the knife handle—that's what the paper said. It was the *Chronicle*, of the Wednesday after Ellie was found—they got it from under the bar and showed me. The article said how she was found and about the wounds and that I was missing, and quoted Otis and the other two who lived at our place as saying that the night before I took off, Ellie and I had this big fight in our bedroom. They said we'd gone in the bedroom freaked out like they were too—Bonny, the other girl, had scored on some pills that day—and they heard screaming and banging around, then things quieted down, and they went to sleep . . . and it wasn't until two days later that Otis opened the door and saw Ellie.

"I had a vague memory of a fight with Ellie. I didn't remember going in the kitchen to get the carving knife—it would have been after the other three had crashed, or they'd have seen me in the kitchen. I didn't remember using the knife on her. I knew I was guilty, because of the fingerprints, but I couldn't take jail—if they put me there I'd do something crazy to get killed, on purpose I'd do it—and Ellie wouldn't want that, because she loved me. We really loved each other. She'd know I'd never have hurt her if I was in my right mind.

"I asked the guys in the Snake if they had any money and they had some and the guy at the bar went in the straw donkey where money was kept and in all I got about $90. I washed up and ten minutes later took a bus to the City and one way and another made it to Canada. I got a phony ID and with so many Americans up there then, I didn't have any problems—I got painting jobs and kept to myself and didn't demonstrate or anything and never got picked up by the cops.

"So now I'm back in Lindenvale. After twelve years. The old scene is gone, the cottage we rented is knocked down, the Stoned Snake

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is gone, everybody I knew is moved, or I suppose dead or in jail or in the nut ward . . . Why'd I come back? Just a crazy impulse. This used to be a beautiful town for Ellie and me. We had some beautiful times here. Before I got that knife out of the drawer and did what I did to her."

All this was told me in a low but clear monotone one June night in my apartment in Lindenvale by a scrawny man I'd met in Pete's Place. We'd been watching the Giants on TV and had passed a few cracks and comments. Then he asked suddenly if I knew any place he could spend the night. He said he was a long way from home with only $14 to his name, which he wanted to save for eating money and a few beers on the trip back—he'd be hitching home tomorrow.

I asked where was home, and he said Vancouver, B.C.

He said that though it was a warm night he didn't want to sleep in the park because the cops might pick him up and find out who he was.

"Who are you?"

"Rich Patterson."

Which meant nothing to me.

I looked him over and he was beat up, with dirty jacket and pants, worn shoes—he looked 40 or more, but as I learned later he was about ten years younger. He had a good enough mouth, a nice forehead, thin sandy hair—with a shave and a good scrubbing he'd look all right. From his brown eyes I got no danger signals, no sense that he was any kind of hood.

"Why would the cops care about Rich Patterson?"

"I'm wanted for murder."

"If that were true, you wouldn't be telling me."

"That makes sense—but it *is* true."

"Then it's not too bright for you to tell me—not if you're trying to work me for a place to sleep."

He gave me a faint smile. "Maybe I'm trying to get you interested. You look like a guy who might be interested in people."

He had me pegged right. I talk to people in bars because you pick up stuff, crazy stuff mostly, with no point, but occasionally you get to talking with a guy and an idea comes.

He finished his beer and said, "Okay. No hard feelings," and started to slide down from his stool.

I said, "I'm leaving too. Come on. I'd like to hear the rest of your story."

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"Yeah?"

"I'm a writer. I need plots to work with."

"What do you write?"

"Murder mysteries."

He raised his eyebrows, smiled, then picked up a blue canvas traveling bag from the floor, and we went out.

We walked three blocks to my place, which is an upstairs studio with a couch-bed, a half-size couch, a TV, a desk with a typewriter, chairs, and a bunch of books. He took a chair, drank from a can of beer I gave him, and told me the story I've set down.

"Why'd you tell me all that?"

"You said you'd like to hear it."

"Sure, but you could have given me any kind of story. You didn't have to tell me the truth—if it *is* the truth."

"Don't you think it's the truth?"

"I think so." As the old phrase goes, it had the ring of truth. "How do you know I won't wait till you're asleep, then call the cops?"

"I don't. Maybe you will."

He took a swallow of beer. His eyes wandered, then fixed on something out in space, or in the past. He murmured, "Only one girl for me—and never another. Ellie. Everything stopped that night."

I got some more beers, gave him one, and sat down again on the couch-bed. "You didn't come back with the thought that maybe you could clear yourself?"

"Clear myself?" He gave a sharp sudden laugh. "You thinking maybe I didn't do it?"

I shrugged. I wasn't thinking anything, I was just starting to poke around, to see if there might be a usable story here. So far there wasn't—a doper did a number on his girl and split. A hippie story from the late sixties—and Ellie isn't the only long-gone hippie. They're all gone. R.I.P.

"Do you remember anything about the night you killed her?" Still poking.

He frowned, rubbed his jaw. "Nothing until next morning. I was walking—maybe I'd been walking a long time. It was early, about seven. I was near the Moonduster. I went in, had a beer or so. Quite a few Sunday-morning drinkers were there. Locko, or Lago, or whatever his name was—he was there. He told me he was going tripping, did I want to come? I knew I'd had a beef with Ellie—I knew that, though I didn't remember any details—and I thought, all right, I'll

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show her. I'll split out for a few days. So I said fine, and I took off with him."

"You have no memory of using the knife on Ellie."

"None."

"So how are you so sure you did use it?"

That high bark of a laugh again. "You haven't been listening. The fingerprints."

I tapped my teeth with a fingernail. The thread of a plot was in this story, used-up hippie scene or not . . . "You said that on Tuesday, Otis opened the bedroom door—it wasn't locked?"

"It was Ellie's and my room. The others knew that."

He looked off. "She was a beautiful person, Ellie. Everybody liked her. She had a mind too—she took courses up at the college." He nodded, indicating the college on the hill west of Lindenvale. "Philosophy mostly. One day she said she'd go for a degree—after she got the fun out of her system." His face was bleak. "I took care of that."

"Everybody liked her—but somebody didn't." I changed lanes. "You had this big fight with her. Did you often fight?"

"No. I don't know that we ever did. Except that night."

I resumed my tooth-tapping. Then I got aware that he was frowning at me. "You're pumping me, aren't you?"

"Sure. Trying to unravel a mystery."

"Mystery? With my prints all over the knife? What mystery?"

"You had this fight with Ellie, then everyone went to sleep. Then sometime before morning you got up and sneaked into the kitchen and got the carving knife, sneaked back and cut her throat so she couldn't scream, stabbed her six times—"

"I was freaked out—remember?"

"That's the problem—it doesn't sound like somebody who's freaked out. It sounds like somebody very aware of what he's doing—and doing it as quietly as he can . . . The other two guys in the house—was there anything between Ellie and either of them?"

"It was just Ellie and me."

"How about Bonny?—Come on, I don't know the people—any chance Ellie and Bonny could have been having a thing?"

His eyes were smoky. "That's just stupid. How many times do I have to say it? It was just Ellie and me!"

He looked at the clock on the shelf. It said after one. "I'm ready for sleep."

"You want a sandwich?"

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"That would be great." I was a good guy again.

He was quiet while I padded around in the kitchen, slapping together buttered bread, cheese, mustard, pastrami. I put two sandwiches on paper plates, gave him one and a fresh beer, and he started devouring. It was a fast job—he was through before I got down three bites.

"Want another?"

He shook his head, jaws working on the last bite. I went back into the kitchen and listened to him say, "No, really . . . No, I couldn't handle another . . ." He had another, and took it down somewhat less wolfishly—we finished about even.

He swallowed beer, sighed, murmured something probably complimentary to me. Then he looked at me and said quietly, "Fingerprints don't lie. I killed Ellie."

A writer keeps poking around. "Was she, or any of you, involved in dealing dope that could have brought some heavy hitter paying a house call?"

"She wasn't into anything—none of us were. Otis drove a cab, the other guy was a part-time something-or-other, Bonny cleaned rooms at the hotel, I painted houses, Ellie went to school—"

"Which brings it down to gut level. Hatred for Ellie for something—or love-hate."

"It was me—the fingerprints prove it." His voice had an edge of anger, as if all this poking had become irritating to him. Which I'm sure it had. But anger comes out of fear—so he was afraid of something. What? Of getting down to the core of this murder? Of losing something?

Which was a rather startling insight. At least, for a couple of seconds it startled *me*.

Then I told myself, stop romanticizing. The guy is angry because every alley I'm poking down, he's probably been down a million times, looking for ways out of his guilt trap. And he's tired; he's been fed and beered up, and all he wants is to go to sleep. If I had any consideration, I'd let him.

"How long did you live with Ellie?"

"Four months."

"How long did you know her?"

"Six months."

"Where'd you meet her?"

"Stoned Snake."

"You said she was beautiful."

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"She was."

"So there must have been boy friends before you. Know any?"

His look was hostile. "You click with a girl, you take it from there. You don't go asking her about her past."

That's where you find the seeds of murder. "Who was she with when you met her?"

"Phil Leach. One of her teachers at college. Old guy—or so I thought then. Nearly forty." He smiled faintly, remembering the past—when all good things were bright and young.

"What was he like?"

"Thin, glasses, mustache, chin that went in—looked like a tall white worm. He was a Ph.D.—I think Ellie was flattered that a Ph.D. would fall for her."

"Had he fallen for her?"

"Sure. He was married, I guess it was breaking up. He was around the Snake with Ellie, off and on—"

"Till you swiped her from him."

"You don't swipe girls. They're not things to be swiped. They make their own choices."

"Well said." It was. "Another view is that when you swipe a guy's girl he may develop some very hostile feelings toward you, and especially toward her, for betraying what was a deep and beautiful love."

He got up. "Where do I sleep?" His voice was abrupt. He'd had enough of me for tonight.

I waved at the short couch. "Curl up, or hang your legs over the end." He'd taken off his jacket, dropped it on the floor, sat down, and was now sliding off his worn shoes.

I went to the closet, got a blanket, and dropped it by him. "Want a bath?"

"Tomorrow." He picked a supine position, legs hanging over, and closed his eyes.

I turned out the lamp, pulled out the couch-bed, lay down myself, and thought things over—all the notions as to how to make a mystery of this twelve-year-old murder seemed to dead-end at the fingerprints.

Organized thinking about fingerprints got me nowhere. I became drowsy, gave my brain a pat, unhooked its leash, told it to take off . . . it bounced around, flitted here and there, free and frolicsome, sniffing around for some fun—and eventually found its way to my favorite fiction address . . .

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—Holmes, you can't get around the damning piece of evidence!

—On the contrary. The evidence you speak of, which is Major Goatwind's monogrammed sock, points unerringly to his innocence.

—But how can you possibly say that? The sock was found jammed down the Duchess' windpipe!

—Exactly. Which proves it had nothing to do with her murder.

—But the medical report—

—Reach me a cigar from the Persian slipper there, like a good fellow . . . thank you. Yes, the medical report is that she died of asphyxia, due to a sock being shoved down her throat. And Lestrade, deciphering the monogram on it, assumes that all questions are answered. But the truth is that before the Major's sock ever got down to her windpipe, the lady had perished.

—How can you possibly know that?

—Historical parallel, old chap. A thorough search in my exhaustive files of sensational literature has at long last turned up an astonishingly similar homicide that took place in 1583, in a remote kingdom lying somewhere south of Suez. In that case not one but *three* differently monogrammed socks had found their way down the throat of a high-born lady. All three suspects were of exalted position. Nonetheless, all three were judged guilty and, we can be sure, expired hideously. Not until forty-three years later did the truth come out—the murderer, also of the peerage, confessed the crime on his deathbed, his sole original intent being to frame his three rivals for royal favor.

—Monstrous! And from that you deduce—

—That Goatwind's sock was not the murder weapon, but a fiendishly subtle afterthought. The true murder sock, the one that stopped the Duchess, had been deftly removed by the killer, and the Major's sock substituted—the purpose being so *Goatwind would take the fall!*

—Holmes! You just took a frightful fall yourself! You pitched right out of the chair, flat on your face!"

—I know.

—How many of those things have you smoked tonight?

—This was a five-joint solution.

Which is the one way to work on a murder case, real or fictional—step back, stop trying to keep in charge of everything, let your brain fool around on its own—what it sniffs out is often surprising.

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After the excursion to 221-B Baker Street my brain curled up and went to sleep. When it woke up, light was coming in the window.

I got up, threw the bed back into the couch, and padded out to the kitchen to concoct a batch of coffee. I carried a mug to the desk, shoved the typewriter aside, got pencil and paper, and began to work out the notion that the Sherlockian interlude had started my thoughts pivoting around.

I worked through two more mugs of coffee, then stood up, reasonably satisfied—but needing some facts.

Patterson apparently hadn't moved since putting down his head. I didn't wake him, figuring that the muffled thunder of rushing bath water would do that. Which it did, gradually. He opened his eyes, sat up, stretched. "What's the time?"

"Past eight. Bath time."

He grinned. "You hinting I should take a bath?"

"Definitely."

Scrubbed and shaved, with a clean shirt from the blue bag, he looked much better. Nearer thirty than forty.

We sat in the kitchen with toast and scrambled eggs. I let him finish his second cup of coffee, then got up. "Let's talk."

I sat at the desk. He took the couch-bed.

"This Leach, did he come to the Thanksgiving dinner?"

"He was at the Snake the night Ellie invited people, and she invited him. Why not? He'd faced it that his thing with her was over."

He hadn't—or what I'd worked up from the Holmes fantasy was all fluff. Which was more than likely. But apparently after being dumped, Leach was still hanging around the Stoned Snake. Maybe so he could catch glimpses of her, see her with Patterson, feed his sense of rejection, of betrayal—feed thoughts of revenge.

"So he came to the dinner. And *you* carved the turkey?"

"Who else?"

"Anybody use the knife to saw off a chunk during dinner, or after?"

"How would I know? I carved, we ate, drank, I carved seconds, a few thirds, we got up, hauled the plates and stuff to the kitchen, played records, sat around the living room, drank, toked—"

"Who did the dishes?"

"Ellie and me."

"When?"

"Next day."

"Do you remember washing the knife?"

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"Ellie washed, I dried. Yeah, I remember drying the knife, putting it away in the drawer—"

"What time Friday did you and Ellie clean up?"

"About noon. We all slept late."

"When nobody was home, was there a way to get into your house?"

He blinked. "Where's that coming from?"

"Just wondering. Dopers forget their keys a lot, or lose them, and usually have another way in."

"The back-door lock, if you pushed hard while reverse-turning the knob, it would spring."

"I suppose other people might have known that."

"A few. You'd tell some friends, in case they got thrown out of their pads, or had a fight or something. Sometimes you'd come home and somebody you didn't even know might be crashed in the living room—a friend of Otis, or Bonny, or the other guy."

"So it was no big secret. So Friday morning you were all sleeping. Which would have been a prime time for someone to come in the back door and walk off with the knife."

He stared at me, and said very slowly, "Nobody walked off with the knife. I just told you that about noon I dried it and put it in the drawer."

"Not *that* knife you didn't. You dried *a* knife just like it—bought that morning as soon as the five-and-dime opened. Then brought to your place, rubbed around in the turkey carcass, left there—and the one you carved with was picked up by the edge of the blade, slipped into a bag, carried out . . ."

He sat very still, watching me. I got that insight again—he was afraid. Afraid of losing something—

I plowed ahead. "He probably kept it in the bag under his car seat, waiting for the time to use it. The time came—this is just guessing, but let's guess. The time came Sunday morning, when he happened to be at the Moonduster, and you came in, and talked with your friend Locko or Lago, and split off with him—and the guy knew you were off the scene.

"So he drove down to your place, parked, probably knocked on the front door soft, got no answer, walked around back—just as he'd done on Friday when he switched the knives. Knock, no answer . . . He had the bag with the fingerprinted knife with him. He let himself in, set the bag down, went to the kitchen drawer, got the second knife, eased into the bedroom, cut Ellie's throat, stabbed her six times—vengeance is mine! Then he took the fingerprinted knife

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from the bag, handling it by the edge of the blade again and probably using gloves, worked it into one of the punctures in Ellie's chest . . . slid the knife he'd killed her with into the bag, took the bag, went out.

"Maybe not Leach at all. Maybe someone else from Ellie's past—but Leach was at the Thanksgiving party, watched you carve, had the chance to look over the setup there—and the way you describe him, he seems the type that could pay back a betrayed love and her lover that way."

He got off the chair fast. I got just a glimpse of his fist. I've been hit in the jaw before, and it's the same each time for me—surprise as I realize I'm going to get clobbered, no particular pain—then seconds or split-seconds later coming to, sitting or lying on the deck. In this case sitting. I'd been knocked out of the chair.

I looked up at him. There was a somewhat wild shine in his eyes. But somehow it didn't convince me that he was in any kind of frenzy.

I fingered my jaw, bounced my teeth together a few times, then ground them, and they felt all right. I thought a comment was in order. "Not bad, not good. Give it a weak six."

He passed a hand over his face. Like the wild look, the gesture didn't quite come off. "I'm sorry." Hoarse mutter. "You're wrong—do you see that now? I explode—for no reason. Like I did that night with Ellie."

I got it. This charade was to prove to me—or to himself?—that he could suddenly turn homicidal.

As if a pop in the jaw has any relationship to premeditated butchery—which the killing of Ellie was.

I got back in the chair, twitched my face in various directions—it worked all right.

He said, "Your story's clever, but it's fiction—you're a fiction writer. It wasn't Leach, that white worm. It wasn't anyone else—it was me. I killed Ellie."

And as he said it I finally had a glimmer as to what he was afraid of losing.

He'd said, "Everything stopped that night." The night she died.

1968. A beautiful year. "We had beautiful times." They were a unity—lover and beloved. All that summer, and September, October, nearly all November—he could have those months always fresh, as if they'd just happened—if time stopped. And it had. Guilt stops time. Guilt had kept him frozen there. With Ellie.

She'd been murdered. He must be her murderer. That made their

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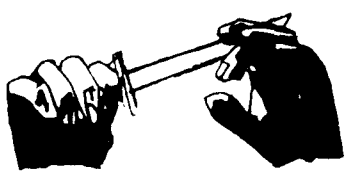
new unity—his guilt. Murdered and murderer—now and forever. No white worm, no others need apply.

A glimmer. Murky, confused, all in a second—poke into it further? No—he'd got his bag, moved toward the door. So leave the glimmer as fiction, something dreamed up by a writer just to round out a story. Leave it at that.

As for the murder—let it hang too. The knives are gone, the witnesses are gone, Leach is dead, or alive, or insane, or sane . . . or innocent; it was someone else.

The Canadian cops might catch Patterson, with his false ID, connect him with the murder—but probably not. Too many new murders to keep track of. Who cares about a hippie girl killed back in 1968? Ancient history—and all the hippies are dead.

We shook hands, and he said, "Sorry about hitting you," and I shrugged and murmured, "Forget it," the way you do, and he said thanks for the couch, beers, food, for not calling the cops. I watched him go down the stairs, and away down the drive. Still buttoned up in his guilt, snug in his frozen circle with Ellie.



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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

MYSTERIES ON TAPE: The market for recorded books on tape is no longer confined to those with impaired vision. These days people even listen to classics and best-sellers on their car's tape deck while driving to work. A California firm, Books on Tape, now boasts a catalog of over three hundred titles, including a large number of mysteries. Conan Doyle's *The Adventures* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* are both available, as are Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*, Ken Follett's *Eye of the Needle*, Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, John le Carre's *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold*, eight of John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee novels, Helen MacInnes's *Prelude to Terror*, Poe's *Selected Short Stories*, Simenon's *Maigret's Christmas*, and three classic Ellery Queen novels—*The Chinese Orange Mystery, The Siamese Twin Mystery*, and *The Spanish Cape Mystery*.

The tapes are available for rental or purchase, and details can be obtained from Books on Tape, P.O. Box 7900, Newport Beach, CA 92660.

HOW DID THEY START? Have you ever wondered how writers get started writing mystery and suspense novels? Often the lure is financial gain of one sort or another. When Earl Derr Biggers died after writing six successful Charlie Chan novels which appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, the magazine went searching for a writer who could create a similar oriental sleuth, offering a trip to China as an inducement. Several writers turned them down, but John P. Marquand accepted. He journeyed to China to soak up the atmosphere and returned to write the first of his Mr. Moto novels. (Mr. Moto was Japanese but that didn't seem to matter.)

In the case of best-selling novelist Ken Follett the financial need was more immediate. Working as a reporter for a London newspaper, he needed two hundred pounds to have his car repaired. A friend had earned exactly that amount writing a mystery novel, so Follett sat down and wrote one in six weeks. He sold it for two hundred pounds, the car was repaired, and his writing career was launched.

MYSTERY CRUISE: For the second straight year Dilys Winn, editor of *Murder Ink* and *Murderess Ink*,

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has organized a transatlantic cruise that promises to delight mystery fans lucky enough to be making the trip. On April 18th, the Norwegian-American cruise ship "Vistafjord" leaves Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for a fifteen-day journey to Genoa, Italy, and back. During the cruise there will be talks by mystery experts, mystery movies, radio mystery shows piped into the cabins, and even a costume party.

Joining Dilys for this year's fun are famed mystery writers John D. MacDonald and Donald E. Westlake, author and criminal-court judge Joe L. Hensley, author and former bank robber Al Nussbaum, New York City policewoman Marie Castoir, mystery bookstore proprietress Ruth Windfeldt (L.A.'s "Scene of the Crime" shop), and EQMN's own movie expert Chris Steinbrunner.

WHO'S ON TOP?: Every so often Bruce Taylor's San Francisco Mystery Bookstore polls its customers on their choices for favorite mystery author and favorite mystery novel. The latest poll, taken some months back, showed Raymond Chandler to be the favorite author by a wide margin, with Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* voted the favorite novel.

MYSTERY FANZINE: The above news item reached me through the pages of *The Poisoned Pen*, a bimonthly mystery fanzine now in its fourth year of publication. It's an unusually good publication, crammed with articles, news, reviews, and letters. The issue I saw contained fifty-two pages, with articles by Bob Adey, Marvin Lachman, and other knowledgeable writers. It's well worth the $9.00-a-year subscription for six issues. Editor is Jeffrey Meyerson, 50 1st Place, Brooklyn, NY 11231.

CHRISTIE ON TV: The first Agatha Christie mysteries ever produced for television will premiere in the United States about the time you're reading this. Scheduled for the Mobil Showcase Network, with dates varying in different cities, the series begins with *The Seven Dials Mystery* in March and *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* in April.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Following last fall's film version of *The First Deadly Sin*, with Frank Sinatra playing New York detective captain Edward X. Delaney, author Lawrence Sanders has completed a third novel about his best-selling sleuth. Titled (naturally) *The Third Deadly Sin*, it deals with the search for a female mass murderer and will be published by Putnam in August.

Editors Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, and Carol-Lynn Waugh are following up the well reviewed Doubleday anthology, *The 13 Crimes of Science Fiction*, with a new one titled *The 12 Crimes of Christmas.* It'll be out this fall, in plenty of time to add to our holiday pleasure.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

One of the very best moments in the new AFD-EMI production of Agatha Christie's *The Mirror Crack'd* occurs right at the very start. As the film begins we are inexplicably thrust into the climax of one of those British "quota-quickie" melodrama films of the Fifties, the kind which all seemed to be set in sinister manor houses, with thunder rumbling in the darkness outside and a Scotland Yard inspector knocking at the door. Murder has been done, the suspects are all assembled and nervous (among them we spot Anthony Steel and Dinah Sheridan, who starred in dozens of whodunits of this vintage), the Yard man is about to finger the guilty party when . . . the film tears, the screen goes blank, and we discover that we are in the parish hall of the country village of St. Mary Mead, with *Murder at Midnight* being screened as the monthly movie entertainment, only the hapless vicar has just announced the projector's gears have jammed and the ending of the film cannot be shown.

But who is the killer, the audience rumbles. Up pops prim spinster Jane Marple, who has used her keen observation during the viewing ("we know the killer *had* to be left-handed") to step in and provide an interim solution. "She's *right*, too," marvels the porter, who had seen the film before. It's our introduction to the screen's newest Miss Marple, Agatha Christie's celebrated village sleuth now perfectly realized by Angela Lansbury.

The late Margaret Rutherford had been most associated with the role, portraying Marple as a dotty busybody in four feature films—only one of them actually based on a Marple book, though two others were reworked from Hercule Poirot mysteries. While Christie became quite friendly with Rutherford, even dedicating a novel to her, she hated what was being done to Marple on the screen. (As well, Gracie Fields once played the sleuth on American television, several actresses had portrayed her on the British stage in versions of *Murder at the Vicarage*, and both Elsa Lanchester and Helen Hayes were considered for proposed TV series.) Finally now, Angela Lansbury told EQMN, someone has allowed an accurate Marple, for those who "know Christie and are devotees of the detective genre"—which the actress was, in her younger days.

"I love women of spirit," says Lansbury, and for the role of the seventy-year-old spinster she permitted herself to be "padded and pushed and corsetted," given liver spots, and aged. But Marple's fierce spirit does not vanish under the makeup. She still believes that the staid village of St. Mary Mead is a microcosm of society anywhere, and any crime could find a parallel in the life beyond her garden. "I'm afraid I have a tendency to believe the worst," she tells her police-inspector nephew (nicely played by Edward Fox) over peach jam. "Not a very nice trait, but

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often justified by subsequent events."

The event which plunges St. Mary Mead into murder is the arrival of a movie company planning to film a historical drama in the area. At a welcoming reception, a giddy local girl chatting with a faded star (Elizabeth Taylor) suddenly collapses and dies. Her drink has been poisoned—but was it actually intended for her, or for the actress? "The mirror crack'd from edge to edge," a line from Tennyson's poem, signifies to the Lady of Shalott she has been cursed.

Miss Marple does not immediately trod upon the scene; indeed, she cannot, having earlier sprained her ankle at a garden fete. So she sifts evidence second-hand, confined to her cottage. (Actually, she never meets *any* of the suspects before solving the crime.) In the best scene in the film Marple prepares a country meal for her nephew, chopping vegetables and fussing over a stove, all the while chopping and fussing over every significant clue the audience needs to solve the case for itself! And the case is complex; screen adaptor Jonathan Hales claims "Agatha Christie novels are like a blueprint for the Concorde. Loosen a single bolt and the whole thing would fall apart." (Christie herself based the entire understructure of the novel upon an actual, and tragic, incident which happened to Hollywood star Gene Tierney.)

The production, filmed in England in the largely unspoiled garden county of Kent, is lavish; the international cast of suspects is star-studded. But at the core is Angela Lansbury's just-right performance as (her words) "a tabby cat." She has been optioned to play Marple twice more, the next to be *At Bertram's Hotel*, where no sprained foot will keep her from the center of the action. (The same film company has scheduled for its next Hercule Poirot adventure, starring Peter Ustinov, *Evil Under the Sun*.) Lansbury was once the fragile suicide of *Dorian Gray*, the evil mommie dearest to deranged Laurence Harvey in *The Manchurian Candidate*. The late John Lennon admiringly called her, referring to her long screen career: "one of the oldies but goodies." So's Miss Marple. And *The Mirror Crack'd* is a goody too.

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INTERVIEW: JOYCE HARRINGTON

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: Your first novel, *No One Knows My Name*, is an exciting event for the many *EQMM* fans who have followed your career since "The Purple Shroud" (EQ's Department of First Stories, 9/72) won that year's Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America for best mystery short story. You wouldn't dream of abandoning the short story for the novel, would you?

HARRINGTON: Abandon the short story? Never! I love reading them

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almost as much as I love writing them. And they're a tremendous discipline to write. It's funny, I started out with short stories because I thought they would be easier to write than a book. They're not, really. They don't take as long but you're compelled to be thrifty with your words and make a character as real as you can in a very small space.

Incidentally, when I won the Edgar, I was living in Parkersburg, West Virginia, and was involved with the Actor's Guild there. About a week before the Awards Dinner, a group of us went to see *Sleuth*, and when the Edgar statuette turned up on the mantel in the movie, they all cheered. For me! They were all so sure I'd get it. I wasn't so sure!

EQMN: What drew you to *EQMM* with your early short fiction?

HARRINGTON: Believe it or not, I did a little market research. I read a lot of magazines, realized that the things I wanted to write about really wouldn't fit in most other magazines, and zeroed in on the Department of Firsts. I've been writing now for about 8 or 9 years and I've been reasonably successful, but nothing will ever equal that first acceptance.

EQMN: Besides being a prolific freelance writer, you're the wife of a celebrated photographer, mother of two teenaged sons, hold down a full-time executive job, and give generously of your time to the Mystery Writers of America. How do you do all that so obviously well?

HARRINGTON: Some things do slip between the cracks. There have been complaints about the cooking. But the boys, in recent years, have become acquainted with the stove and we've had some interesting meals. I guess the answer is that if you want to do something badly enough, you just find the time to do it. And as far as giving my time to the MWA, I truly feel I can never do enough for that group. What little I do manage to do is trifling compared to the encouragement and support I've received from the members.

EQMN: Your characterizations, especially of women, cover a wide spectrum—spoiled daughters, smothered mothers, mothers-to-be, too-busy mothers, thrown-away mothers, good sisters, bad sisters, women scorned, country girls, women of the world.

HARRINGTON: All those women! I'm going to have to write more about men. I don't know how to explain the variety except that I guess since they all come out of my own thoughts and feelings, they're all burdened with bits and pieces of me. (The men too, for that matter.) I can't approach a character by saying, well, here's Minnie Murphy and she's 56 years old and wears support stockings and cleans office buildings at night and one of these days she's going to kidnap the chairman of the board at mop-point. I usually wait for Minnie to say something, and if it's the right thing I know who she's going to be and little by little she takes shape and her motives become clear to me. This probably isn't very helpful. It's a little obscure to me—I don't really know *how* the process of writing takes place. I don't go at it in a logical manner.

EQMN: Do you know before you begin a work of fiction if the tone will be serious or humorous?

HARRINGTON: Well, yes and no. Years ago, when I was doing a lot

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of acting, a friend insisted that I was really a very funny lady, but I thought I was a tragic heroine. What I've learned in the years since is that funny isn't so far removed from tragic. You said you thought the two most recent stories *EQMM* bought were funny, and I just happened to notice that when I wrote them I was in a bit of a grouch. I don't know what that means, but I will say this. I'd give anything to be able to write funny consistently—not belly-laugh funny, but sly, wry, witty, pointed funny. I'd also like to have naturally curly hair. Oh, well.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Gregg Press's admirable mystery reprint series has come up with new editions of early books by two of the field's best writers. The 1932 novel *Manhattan Love Song* ($10.95) provides a bridge between Cornell Woolrich the jazz-age Fitzgeraldite and Cornell Woolrich the master of brooding suspense. The novel is just the brittle, emotional, dark-hued melodrama the title suggests, and it provides a vivid picture of New York in the late Twenties. Few if any in the mystery field have matched Woolrich's magical, evocative prose. Francis M. Nevins, Jr. provides an informative introduction.

Ross Macdonald's *The Dark Tunnel* ($12.95), published in 1944 as by Kenneth Millar, is the first novel by Lew Archer's creator. It is an espionage tale with an academic background rather than a private-eye adventure, but the prose and the urgent plot movement foreshadow the author's later work. Bill Pronzini's introduction is a valuable added feature.

**** Peter Straub: *Shadowland*, Coward, McCann, and Geoghegan, $12.95. In a fine novel of mystery, fantasy, and horror, Straub captures the dark side of fairy tales, the terrors of adolescence, and the fearful suggestion of real magic behind the pleasant trickery of stage magic. Locales are a pernicious boys' school in Arizona and the titular wilderness estate in Vermont.

*** Richard Forrest: *The Death at Yew Corner*, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, $10.95. As usual, Forrest offers plenty of carefully spaced scenes of action and menace to enliven a classical mystery, this time involving labor troubles at a convalescent home and including a very intricate and cleverly worked-out locked-room problem. (Note for fans: Have Beatrice and Lyon Wentworth followed the example of Phoebe Atwood Taylor's Asey Mayo and grown *younger* as their series has progressed?)

*** Barbara D'Amato: *The Hands of Healing Murder*, Charter, $2.50. Here is a genuine throwback to detective stories of the Thirties, pure detection with scarcely a concession to the action, menace, and personal in-

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volvement expected by contemporary readers. Dr. Gerritt DeGraaf, neither as colorful nor as irritating as Philo Vance, is the sleuth. The solution to the impossible crime, also like many from the Thirties, is both enormously ingenious and of doubtful workability. The reader has every chance to solve it. I liked this book, but not everyone will.

*** Nathan Aldyne: *Vermilion*, Avon, $2.25. The latest contribution to the homosexual mystery is strong on background and characters from Boston's gay sub-culture but fairly weak on puzzle plot. Neither shrill nor preachy nor tasteless, it has a good chance to appeal to straight as well as gay readers.

** Stockton Woods: *The Laughing Man*, Fawcett-Gold Medal, $1.95. Woods is reportedly an alter ego of the increasingly prolific Forrest. Certainly the expected plot twists and action scenes are present in profusion in the melodramatic tale of a Vietnam deserter who leaves the safety of Canada to visit his ailing mother and becomes involved in a series of murders. The novel does not end quite as well as it begins, and the cover is overinformative about one of the plot's secrets.

** Lee Karr: *The Housesitter*, Avon, $2.25. This romantic thriller starts well, as the titular heroine finds herself with an unwelcome ready-made family on her housesitting assignment. She is promised the return of her lover, who vanished in Vietnam, in exchange for going over some cloak-and-dagger hurdles. Once the truth starts to be revealed, though, an intriguing mystery becomes an unusually sappy romance.

** Raymond Obstfeld: *The Dead-End Option*, Charter, $2.25. Fans of Lawrence Block's Bernie Rhodenbarr books should enjoy this comic pursuit thriller about Newport Beach movie usher Harry Gould and his involvement with a dead body and $200,000 in bearer bonds. The plot is on the thin side, but the book is very funny at its best moments.

Readers with the good taste to enjoy parodies should seek out *The Best of John Sladek* (Pocket Books, $2.50), the first short-story collection by the creator of detective Thackeray Phin to be published in the U.S. Most of Sladek's targets are science-fiction writers, but mystery fans will enjoy "The Locked Room," a splendid comic dissertation on John Dickson Carr's specialty, and "Broot Force" (signed by Icklick As-i-move), which has sport with the Three Laws of Robotics. Even the father of the detective story is not sacred—Poe's Dupin returns in "The Purloined Butter."

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Mrs. Martin's first story, "Death by Default," appeared in our issue of September 10, 1980. Before the story could be published, Mrs. Martin sent us a second story, with the following letter: "My son and I have been discussing the idea for this story for two years and I've written at least a dozen versions. I have hesitated to submit it because I realize the number of your readers interested in coon hunters and coon hounds is probably limited. But I can't stand it any more, so here it is for better or worse. My area [Appomattox, Virginia] abounds in colorful characters . . . and I would so like to tell the world about them" . . .

A STRANGER CALLS

by CAROL MYERS MARTIN

"What do you think, Bell? Gonna be a good night for huntin'?" The dog's intelligent brown eyes brightened and her whole heavy black body wriggled in delight under Getch's old hard hand.

"Now, now, just settle down. Ain't time to go yet. I got to have my supper and rest up a while," he scolded affectionately. " 'Twas a mistake to take on a young dog like you at my age, anyhow. Like an old man marryin' a young woman. Plain crazy."

Bell sat down, thumping her tail on the hard clay of the bare back yard, and laid her huge head on his knee. The light tannish-yellow markings on her muzzle and above her eyes, contrasting sharply with her coal-black coat, gave her, to the uninitiated, an evil, almost satanic, look. To the coonhunters of the area, however, she was a fine specimen of her breed, named for its distinguishing coloration, the Black-and-Tan.

"I ain't a pup no more, like you," the old man rambled on. "Done lived long past my time. Ought to be layin' out there beside Callie-Em. Wisht I was. Ain't nothin' here for me no more. Now, you, you're

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a good dog, prettiest mouth I ever heard and you'll stay at the tree till somebody comes. No yap, yap, once or twice, then gone like some I've seen. You keep on goin' the way you are and you got a lot of good years ahead of you. Anybody'd be proud to own you. No, I ain't worried about what'll become of you when I'm gone."

The dog's eyes closed and she drew a deep contented breath. The old fellow's words were meaningless to her, but the sound of his voice made her life worth living. When it stopped abruptly, she pricked her long ears and raised her head.

The man who had suddenly appeared out of the deepening twilight was a stranger, but Bell, though alert, was silent. Her master knew the man was there and was showing no concern. Bell resumed her doze.

Getch couldn't trust his dimming eyes any more but he was sure he didn't know the man. No one would have guessed it, though, from the cordial greeting he called out.

"How're you?"

"I'm lost." The accent told Getch instantly in two short words that the man was not only a stranger to him but to the area. To the state, in fact. He sounded like a big-city radio announcer. "My car broke down and I'm trying to get into town."

He was tall, too thin, and very pale, Getch observed as he drew closer. The stranger's face was almost mask-like, expressionless.

"Man right down the road fixes cars," Getch informed him pleasantly, indicating the direction with his thumb. "Got a tow truck, too."

He got stiffly to his feet, dislodging Bell's head. Annoyed by the rude awakening, and suddenly taking affront at what she considered the stranger's unwarranted intrusion on her domain, she gave vent to her feelings with a deep-throated bellow that seemed to shake the ground.

The stranger jumped back, cursing. "Keep that devil away from me!"

Getch tensed. He neither used, nor allowed others in his presence to use such language, and he was infuriated at hearing Bell so maligned. He let the man know it.

"Watch your tongue, Mister! She ain't no devil and she ain't gonna hurt you." He stopped and added on a sudden mischievous inspiration, "Unless I tell her to. Hush up, Bell!"

The stranger relaxed as Bell subsided but warily kept his distance.

Getch wondered why the man didn't go on his way to see about

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getting his car fixed before it got dark. At the same time he was reluctant to see him leave. Getch had few visitors and even one as rude and blasphemous as this one was better than none.

"Want to come in and rest a while?" he invited. "I was just about to eat supper. If you're hungry, you're welcome to what I got."

"Thanks." The man looked at Bell out of the corner of his eye as the three of them started to the door of Getch's shack. "Is she coming, too?"

"Why, yes," Getch answered, surprised at the question. "She goes everywhere I do."

The cluttered kitchen was pleasantly warm after the cool fall air outside and the good smells coming from the pots and pans on the wood stove were tantalizing to the stranger, though he could identify none of them.

"I'll just fix you a plate," Getch said and proceeded to do so, filling it with boiled vegetables and crisply browned pieces of what his visitor thought must have been very small chicken.

"I never could make corn bread good as Callie-Em's," Getch sighed, handing him a hunk.

The stranger cleaned the plate faster than Getch would've thought possible if he hadn't been watching.

"You want some more?" he asked. "Surely. Eat all you want." He smiled as he loaded the plate again. "Believe you like my turnips and creecies. Didn't think you would. Don't expect you had them where you come from."

The stranger gave him a quick suspicious look. "What do you mean, 'where I come from'?"

"Oh, nothin', nothin'," Getch said hastily, fearing he had done the unthinkable, had insulted a guest in his house. "I just guessed you were from the city because you were scared of Bell. Everbody in the county's used to hound dogs, and from the way you talk I can tell you're from up North somewhere."

"Oh. No, I never ate turnips and what? Creecies? The chicken's good."

Getch chuckled. "Ain't chicken. It's squirrel."

The stranger looked a bit peculiar, but he ate another piece anyway.

He walked restlessly to the window and stared out through the dirt-clouded glass.

"That your pickup out there? Do you drive it?"

"Yeah, that's mine. I don't drive it much. Just to town once a

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month to get my little check and a few groceries. I go to church some but not like I did before Callie-Em went away."

"Was she your wife? She left you?"

"Yes. Ten years ago. I miss her like it was no more'n yesterday she went. I ain't tryin' to tell Him what to do, but I'll sure be glad when He lets me go, too, so I can be with her."

"He? What's this 'He' got to do with your being with your wife?"

"Why, He's got everything to do with it, the Lord has!"

The stranger thought for a moment, frowning, then he grasped the meaning of the old man's words.

"You mean she's dead?"

"That's what I mean. And I'm ready to join her anytime."

Bell had been lying quietly in the corner while the men ate. She had been fed early, as was Getch's custom on nights they were going hunting, to give her time to digest her food so she wouldn't feel sluggish and lazy when she needed to be lively and alert. Bell knew that and she'd understood the gist of Getch's talk about going hunting earlier. Well, now it was dark outside and time to go. She got up and began pacing impatiently around the crowded little room.

The stranger watched her nervously.

Getch wondered why he didn't go on his way now. He had his belly full and a broken-down car to see about. Getch still wasn't eager to get rid of him, exactly, but he really wasn't much company. Hardly talked at all, and he might as well have come from another world for all Getch knew.

Bell circled the room for the third time and sat down, banging her tail on the floor and looking pleadingly from Getch's face to the rifle on the wall rack and back again.

Getch laughed. "She wants to go huntin'. Why don't you come on with us?" Without waiting for an answer, he got up and began pulling on a tattered, stained hunting jacket. "Hand me my rifle, please. Be careful, it's loaded." He pointed to the gun rack behind the stranger.

The man eyed him for a moment, glanced out the window, then reached up and took down the rifle.

"All right, Pop. This is it. I want the key to that truck and all the money you've got! Now!" He leveled the rifle barrel at Getch's chest.

The old man's mouth fell open and his eyes widened in shock. His shaking hand reached out blindly, finally found a chair back, and held on. It was a full minute before he could gather his wits enough to speak.

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"Money?" he gasped at last. "What money I got's in that can on the shelf. That coffee can there. Take it. Take it."

"Don't worry, Pop, I will." Holding the rifle balanced against his shoulder, he kept it aimed directly at Getch as he used his free hand to grab the can, work the lid off, and dump its contents on the table. "Is this all you got?" he demanded disgustedly as three wadded bills fell out, the largest of them a five.

"Yes, it's all. I don't get a very big check and this month I had to pay my taxes."

"All right. Forget it." The stranger rammed the bills into his pocket.

"Now where's the truck key?"

"That I don't know, Mister. I've been tryin' to think. I lose that doggoned thing ever' time I use it and have to look for it the next time I want it. I ain't got no idea where it is."

"You're lying!"

"I don't lie, Mister." Getch faced him squarely. "I'd give it to you if I had it. But I ain't, so I can't. That's all there is to it."

The odd behavior of the two men had puzzled Bell and she had been sitting silently eyeing them throughout. Now, she decided, it was time to act. She let go with her powerful voice again. The noise was deafening in that close space.

The stranger spun around, the rifle pointed at Bell's head. He lost a few seconds fumbling with the safety and in that short length of time Getch managed to stumble across the room and grab the barrel. His feeble strength was no match for the much younger man's, but he threw him off balance for a few more precious seconds.

Getch used them to fling open the door. "Go on, Bell!" he yelled, "Go get us a coon! Go on, tree a coon, girl!"

The dog didn't hesitate. This she understood. With a joyous bawl she sprang out the door and into the safety of the darkness outside.

Weak with relief, Getch sagged against the door.

The stranger's face twisted in an ugly grin. "Let's hear it for Pop," he sneered. "Risked his life to save his dog."

"She's got a lot more good years than I have," Getch said weakly.

"Oh, that's right, you said you wanted to die, didn't you, Pop? Well, get in here and shut the door, it's cold."

Getch closed the door and hobbled to his rocking chair beside the stove.

He replenished the fire from the wood box and sat motionless, his head resting against the chairback, his eyes closed.

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"Hey, you can't go to sleep on me, Pop!" The stranger shook him roughly. "I said find that key and I meant now! I haven't got all night."

"I told you I don't know where it is," Getch answered wearily without opening his eyes. "It's around here somewhere. I'll have to look for it."

"Then look for it!" The man swore violently and jabbed the rifle barrel into Getch's ribs.

Getch, grasping the chair arms, struggled to his feet and walked haltingly around the room, poking disinterestedly at the piles of junk without result.

"Look, Pop, I said I didn't have all night!" The stranger began pulling things off the shelves, sweeping dishes off the table, letting them crash to the floor.

"Wait a minute, mister," Getch protested. "You ain't got to break up all my stuff. Them things was Callie-Em's."

"She don't need 'em no more and neither will you, Pops, if you don't come up with that key and quick. Is it in your pocket?"

The old man turned his overall and jacket pockets inside out, disclosing bent, rusty nails, a faded bandanna, matches, a sticky cake of chewing tobacco, and nothing else.

"Mister, my legs is about to give out. Can I sit down?"

"Yes, sit down and think, old man." He flourished the rifle. "If you don't give me that key in the next five minutes, I'm going to kill you. You know that?"

Getch's eyes flew open in alarm. "Oh, no, Mister! You can't do that!"

"Changed your mind in a hurry, didn't you, Pop? Thought you said you wanted to die."

"I did and I do," the old fellow retorted with quiet dignity. "But I don't want you to kill me."

"What difference does it make?" The stranger grinned evilly, clicking the safety off and on and off again. "What do you care how you die if you want to die anyway?"

"I don't care. One way's as good as another. I do hope it'll be quick but that's for Him to decide." He rubbed his knee reflectively. "No, I don't care. For myself. It's you I'm thinkin' about."

"Me?"

"Why, certainly. I don't want my death to make you a murderer."

The stranger stared. "That really isn't your problem, is it, Pop?" he asked sarcastically.

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"Well, of course it is!" the old man snapped. "I can't just set here and let you do something I know is wrong without at least tryin' to stop you. I care about your soul if you think you don't."

"Look, Pop, I'm not worried about my soul now or ever. I'm worried about getting out of here and I can't without that truck key. So you'd better come up with it. Fast!" He jabbed Getch with the rifle barrel again and flexed his finger on the trigger.

The old man shrank back in the chair, then suddenly lifted his head and listened.

The stranger's head jerked up and his eyes flew to the door.

From the woods that came up almost to the house, he could hear the dog. Her sonorous voice sounded almost like organ tones, rolling through the trees.

"It's Bell," Getch half whispered. "She's treed."

"Yeah? Well, bully for her. As long as she stays out there."

"She will. She'll stay till I come."

The old man's head dropped back. He appeared to be asleep.

The stranger sank down in a chair opposite him. He was very tired himself. The heat from the stove was making him drowsy. It was urgent that he move on, put more miles between him and them. Or was it? Maybe he'd be just as well off here. They wouldn't think of looking for him here.

Cradling the rifle so that the barrel remained pointed directly at Getch, he let himself relax and in seconds he was dozing . . .

"Drop it! Get your hands up! High!"

The rifle fell with a clatter as the stranger confusedly struggled to comprehend where he was, what had happened.

The voice had come from the window but before the stranger could focus his attention in that direction, the door had opened and a second voice was ordering him to put up his hands and freeze.

Then efficient hands searched him deftly and a few moments later cold steel was encircling his wrists.

Getch came awake with a jolt. "Thank God you got here," he gasped when he understood what was going on, "in time to save him."

"Save him?" one deputy laughed grimly. "Looked to me like you were the one in trouble."

"Oh, no, not me," Getch shook his head.

"But he was gonna kill you."

"Yes, and I'd've been with Callie-Em. But he'd've had a murder to answer for."

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No one spoke for a moment, then Getch asked, "Who is he? How'd you know he was here?"

"He's an escaped convict, Getch, and dangerous. We didn't know he was here. We found his car broke down and we've been searchin' the area all night. We heard Bell treein' and when she stayed at that one tree so long, we knew something must be wrong. You'd never let her tree that long without going to her if you could get there. So we thought we'd better check."

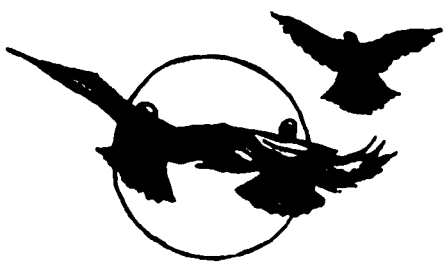
"Well, I'm glad you did." Getch paused and listened. "She's still there! I've got to go see what she's got. Ruins a good dog if you don't show some appreciation when they're doin' their best."

He bent down slowly and picked up the rifle. Holding it, he looked at the prisoner kindly. "I'll be prayin' for you, son."

As he hobbled out the door, the prisoner looked sideways at the nearest deputy.

"He really believes in that stuff, doesn't he?"

The deputy returned his look. "Yes," he said, "yes."



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a *NEW* short story by

JAMES HOLDING

The two men had planned to meet in Pittsburgh to attend their college reunion, usually a joyous occasion. But something happened en route, and after that "the whole tragic business took less than an hour" . . .

BY PERSON OR PERSONS UNKNOWN

by JAMES HOLDING

I was skimming through the local newspaper on Tuesday morning when a one-paragraph item on an inner page caught my eye. I read it through, feeling suddenly queasy with apprehension, and realized that now I'd have to go to the police. I couldn't wait any longer.

I took the newspaper with me when I left my room on the eighth floor of the hotel and descended to the lobby. I went across to the reception desk and asked one of the clerks on duty where I could find Police Headquarters.

The clerk looked at me curiously. "Our security office is on the mezzanine," he said. "I hope nothing's wrong, sir?"

"Nothing to do with the hotel," I said. "Everything's fine. I just want to know how to get to Police Headquarters."

"Oh. You can walk there in five minutes." He gave me directions. I thanked him and left. He still had a puzzled look on his face.

Police Headquarters was a massive five-story building of mud-colored stone blocks with a tall tower that looked like something left over from a medieval palace. Inside, I asked a pretty female desk sergeant for Missing Persons and she directed me politely to

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a room on the fifth floor.

There a plainclothes officer named Lieutenant Jenkins—if the metal sign on his desk didn't lie—asked me my business. Jenkins was middle-aged, paunchy, and perspiring heavily, even with his jacket off in the air conditioning. He had the deeply lined face and world-weary expression of a man who has listened for too long to other people's troubles and now finds them infinitely boring.

"Lieutenant," I said, "I want to inquire about this news item in the morning paper." I put the newspaper on his desk and pointed to the item in question. He took a pair of crescent-shaped reading glasses out of his shirt pocket, put them on, and read the item through. Then he leaned back in his desk chair.

"What do you want to know about it?" he asked, giving me a sleepy stare. "You think you know this man it describes?"

"I hope not," I said. "But I might." I quoted from the article. " 'The body of an unidentified man was found floating in the Allegheny River yesterday. He had a fractured skull and two broken legs. He was about six feet tall, had dark brown hair, a slender build, brown eyes, weighed 180, and could be anything between twenty-five and thirty-five years old.' "

"I can read," said Jenkins. "So?"

"He could be my brother-in-law," I said.

"Your brother-in-law is missing?"

"Well, he's late, anyway, Lieutenant. He was supposed to meet me here in Pittsburgh last weekend, but he hasn't shown up yet."

Jenkins hitched himself closer to his desk, took an official form off a stack at his elbow, and thumbed a ballpoint pen. "Let's have the details," he said matter-of-factly.

I didn't feel matter-of-fact at all, but I said, "Okay. What do you want first?"

"Your brother-in-law's name and address."

"James B. Carey, 228 Campbell Street, Atlanta, Georgia."

"Your name and address?"

"Norcross Smith, Jacinto Way, San Francisco, California," I said, "but I'm currently staying in Room 824 at the William Penn Hotel here in town."

"Your brother-in-law was supposed to meet you here last weekend?"

"Yes. I flew in on Saturday and hung around waiting for him to show up, but he hasn't appeared yet. I didn't think anything of it at first. He was driving up from Atlanta and he told me he didn't

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expect to hurry, as he didn't really have to be here until tomorrow. So I figured he might get here any time from Saturday to yesterday, depending on when he left home and how many miles he drove a day. It's nearly a thousand miles, you know."

"When did he expect to leave Atlanta?"

"Friday morning. And he did, too. I know that."

Jenkins raised his eyebrows. "How can you be sure of that?"

"By last night I got so worried I called his wife in Atlanta. My sister, Flo. And she said he definitely left for Pittsburgh about eleven o'clock Friday morning."

Jenkins was writing away on his form. I went on, "My sister was pretty upset when I told her Jim hadn't arrived here yet. But I told her not to worry—he'd probably had car trouble that delayed him, or had to lay over somewhere for a day or two because of those tornadoes they've been having in North Carolina. I told Flo that Jim would get in touch with her the minute he arrived. But he's still not here. So when I saw that item in the paper this morning I thought I'd better come to you." I swallowed hard. "I'm worried as hell about Jim."

A faint spark of what might have been sympathy appeared briefly in the pale eyes behind Lieutenant Jenkins' spectacles. "Can't blame you for that, Mr. Smith," he said. "Why were you and your brother-in-law meeting in Pittsburgh?"

"College reunion," I said. "My brother-in-law and I were classmates at Carnegie-Mellon. That's how Jim came to meet and marry my sister Flo. Jim and I planned to attend our tenth reunion together. It starts tomorrow."

"Carnegie-Mellon." Jenkins made a final note. "My nephew went to Pitt," he said. Then, gratuitously, he added, "I never went anywhere except high school." He put down his pen and looked at me over the tops of his glasses. "We'll get to work on this right away, Mr. Smith. But first, I think you ought to take a look at this guy in the morgue." He tapped the newspaper article. "You got a strong stomach?"

I swallowed again, dryly, and nodded. "I can stand it, I guess. If it's just a skull fracture and broken legs, it oughtn't to be too bad."

Jenkins shrugged. "It ain't the cadavers so much as the smell of the joint that gets to me," he said. "I can't get used to it, and I been messing around in morgues and hospitals for years." He pushed back his desk chair, stood up, and took his jacket from a hook on the wall. "I'll go with you to the morgue, Mr. Smith. It may help

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you to have me there. And it may save me some time. It's just around the corner on Fourth Avenue."

I started to protest but he held up a hand. "If the guy in the morgue *is* your brother-in-law, that's it, see, as far as my department is concerned. Okay?"

"Okay," I said.

Ten minutes later, flanked by Lieutenant Jenkins on my right and a green-smocked morgue attendant on my left, I was staring down at a sheeted body resting in a long shallow drawer which had been pulled out of its recess in the wall.

The morgue attendant folded back the sheet only far enough to expose the head of the dead man. The eyes were closed, the pale face unmarked, although discolored and swollen from its immersion in the river. One lock of dark hair escaped from the rubber hood that covered the rest of the head and lay like a sinister apostrophe on his forehead.

I found myself perspiring, and was conscious in a confused way that Lieutenant Jenkins beside me was looking not at the corpse but directly at me, watching for my reaction. He murmured, "Take it easy, Mr. Smith. Take your time."

Controlling as best I could the wave of nausea that washed through me, I stepped back from the gruesome drawer and said hoarsely, "That's Jim, Lieutenant. That's my brother-in-law."

"You sure?" asked Jenkins, a note of relief in his voice.

"I'm sure," I said. "Can we get out of here now? Please?" I swallowed against the acid in my throat.

"Sure," said Jenkins. He conferred briefly with the morgue attendant, giving him the name and address of the man in the drawer, while I headed for the door. Then we returned to Jenkins' office at Headquarters. On the way I breathed deeply of the humid June air in the street, trying to master my queasiness.

While Jenkins hung up his jacket, I mopped my face with my handkerchief and sat down in the same chair I'd left only minutes before. I said to Jenkins, "That was pretty bad, Lieutenant, wasn't it? You were right about the smell."

He grunted and sat down behind his cluttered desk. "So," he said with satisfaction, "we got positive identification—the dead man is James B. Carey, your brother-in-law, right?"

"Right," I said. "What happens now?"

"Autopsy. The pathologist's probably started on it already."

I showed my surprise. "Autopsy? What for?"

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"It's the law. We got to have one. To establish legal cause of death for the Coroner's inquest."

"An inquest, too?"

He waved a hand. "Just a formality in a case like this."

"Do I have to stay here for it?"

"Be better if you do. It shouldn't be long, a couple of days, maybe. You're going to that reunion tomorrow anyway."

"Not any more, I'm not." The reunion seemed something unreal and trivial to me now. "But I'll stay. What about Jim's—uh—remains?"

"You can have the body as soon as they finish the autopsy and write up the report." Jenkins looked at me over the tops of his glasses. "You better telephone the bad news to your sister, hadn't you? Unless you'd rather have me do it, in my official capacity? It's a dirty job, either way."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll do it myself. And I'll let you know what she decides about the disposition of the body. She's just getting over major surgery and I'm pretty sure she won't want to go through with a formal funeral in Atlanta right now. She'll probably want Jim cremated. Would that be possible?"

"No problem. If you authorize it and pay for it. We can ship the ashes to her along with the death certificate."

"Maybe I'll deliver them to her personally," I said. "Under the circumstances I guess I'd better stop off in Atlanta on my way home and see if I can help her get through this." I stood up. "Anyway, Lieutenant, thanks for your help."

"Sorry it turned out this way. We'll be in touch with you, Mr. Smith. Room 824, William Penn Hotel. Right?"

"Right," I said, and left. The whole tragic business took less than an hour.

At the inquest on Thursday morning the Coroner heard testimony from only three witnesses: the teenage swimmer who had spotted my brother-in-law's body floating face down in the river below Highland Park Bridge; the autopsy surgeon who described in technical medical jargon his findings in the post-mortem examination; and me, the victim's brother-in-law, who went over again in detail the same facts I had already given to Lieutenant Jenkins at the Missing Persons Bureau.

The proceedings, as Jenkins had foretold, were routine, and ended with the verdict that my brother-in-law had met his death (before his body was put in the water) at the hands of a person or persons unknown. Murdered, in other words; whereupon the Homicide Di-

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vision took over in the person of a Detective Robeson, who merely shrugged fatalistically when I asked him afterward about the chances of finding Jim's murderer.

"I'm sorry to say the chances are slim," he said. "The only way we can figure this setup at all, Mr. Smith, is that somebody—probably a hitchhiker your brother-in-law picked up—caved in his skull with a tire iron or a gun butt or a rock or something, and then robbed him. Probably ran his car over him a few times to fake a hit-and-run accident. Then he threw him in the river, stole his car, and lit out for parts unknown."

I nodded. "That sounds possible," I said.

"You can see where it leaves us, though," said Robeson. "Your brother-in-law's in the river for a couple of days, then in the morgue for a couple more before we even known who he is. Then two more days go by before it's decided he was murdered. So the killer's probably in Mexico City or Winnipeg or Europe by now, and no sweat. You get the picture?"

"I get it," I said.

"We'll do what we can, of course."

"I'm sure you will. And thanks very much. And good luck."

The motel in Atlanta was out on the edge of town near where Route I-75 takes off from the beltway for Florida. I was sitting in the last booth at the back of the dining room, fiddling with a martini and waiting for Flo.

When she came in the door of the restaurant, she looked over the few diners and saw me. She headed my way without even a smile of recognition, and as she came weaving between the tables I got the old feeling in my guts, just as I had six years ago. She was still as beautiful as ever, but now she had a drawn look to her face that hadn't been there when she first came to Atlanta.

I stood up when she approached my booth and said, "Hi, Flo. Want a drink?"

"Vodka and tonic," she said, and sank into her seat stiffly, as though she was furious about something.

She was, too. For after a waitress had brought her drink and departed, she burst out, "What are you playing at *now?* If you wanted to tell me some good news—and God knows, I can't think what it could be if *you're* bearing it!—why didn't you just tell me? And what's all the stupid business about swearing me to secrecy and making me come to this dump instead of coming home?"

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"Because," I said with a flourish, "I'm dead, Flo."

She stared at me. "You're *what?*"

"Dead, Flo. Legally dead. Aren't you glad? Now you can marry your dear Bert and I can't refuse you a divorce any more."

"You're out of your head!" she said with disgust. "Or drunk. What are you talking about?"

"I'm telling you I'm dead, Flo, darling. Deceased. I died in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania last Sunday. And here's my death certificate to prove it." I shoved it across the table to her. "Read it."

With a pitying glance at me, like the look she'd give a retarded child, she took the certificate in her hand and read it through.

"See?" I said. "James B. Carey. That's me, your loving husband, Flo. Aren't you even going to tell me how much you appreciate my thoughtfulness in getting out of your way at last? So you and your boy friend can make everything nice and legal?"

"I don't understand, Jim." She raised her eyes to mine. "Is this another of your sick jokes?"

"No way," I remonstrated. "Why, Flo, you really don't believe I'm dead, do you? In spite of the certificate?" I took the small metal canister from the bench beside me and passed it across the table. "Well, I *am* dead. And to remove all doubt, darling, here are my ashes. I was cremated on Thursday. Look inside."

She shrank back, nearly knocking over her drink as she hastily removed her arm from the table. She started to stand up. "Of all the insane things. You're a real nut case, Jim, stark staring mad! I'm going home."

"Sit down," I said. "Sit down and let me tell you all about it. After all, I did it mostly for your sake."

She slowly sank back into her seat, torn between curiosity and aversion. "Did what?"

I said, "I came off the Pennsylvania Turnpike, crossed the river at Oakmont, and was heading for Pittsburgh along the south side of the river. It was full dark. The road was poorly lit and absolutely empty of traffic at that time of night.

"All of a sudden I saw this guy loom out of the blackness beside the road into my headlights. I tried to stop. I tried to swerve away to avoid him, but it was too late. I hit him going at forty-five miles an hour.

"I don't know whether it was with the front fender or the bumper. After that first impact he came flying up over my radiator, his arms and legs all twisted. It was horrible, Flo. I thought he'd come right

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through the windshield. Then the back of his head hit the front edge of the roof with a tremendous thud.

"Believe me, I was sick. I stopped the car and just sat there shaking for a minute or two, with his big dead body, with a caved-in skull lying on the hood of my car like a deer's carcass, bleeding, and his eyes staring through the windshield at me!" I shuddered, remembering. "That's how it happened, Flo—it was an unavoidable accident, so help me God!—and I fully intended to take his body in and report it to the Oakmont police. But when I finally pulled myself together enough to get out of the car and take his body down off my hood, I got my first good look at him in my headlights." I paused and looked at Flo. "And then I had a better idea."

Flo shivered. "You're a ghoul, Jim," she whispered. She was beginning to understand now.

"Believe it or not, this guy looked a hell of a lot like me, Flo. Same height, same hair and eye color, about the same build. I thought he must be a drunk or a hitchhiker to be walking along that road at night, miles from anywhere. When I searched him, all he had on him was a couple of bucks and a half-empty pack of cigarettes. No credit cards, no wallet, no identification, no family snapshots, nothing. A guy from nowhere. So can you blame me for thinking he was a heaven-sent opportunity to set you free, Flo?"

She shook her head. "You didn't do it for me," she said.

"Of course I did. Don't you want to hear the rest of the story?"

"No," she said. But she made no move to leave.

"The river bank was only thirty feet from the road, through the brush. I carried the body over and dropped him in the water, figuring the current would carry him down a ways. Then I drove on into Pittsburgh, making one stop on the way to wash my car thoroughly at one of those wash-it-yourself places that was still open. When I got to Pittsburgh I left my car on the top floor of an automatic parking garage, right across the street from the hotel. I registered at the hotel as Norcross Smith from San Francisco"—I grinned at Flo—"your fictitious brother, darling, who later identified your husband's body, namely me, if you see what I mean."

I expected Flo to say something but she kept as quiet as the guy I'd thrown in the river. So I gave her the rest of it, about the identification and inquest and so on. At the end she said quite calmly, "All right, Jim. According to you, I'm a widow now, and as such I can legally marry Bert." She gave me a look of chilling contempt. "So why this sudden impulse to set me free? As if I didn't know."

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I nodded. "It sticks out a mile, doesn't it, once you know the story?"

"Your insurance."

"What else? Armed with that death certificate there, you can put in a claim today and have the money inside a week! A hundred thousand dollars!"

"And pass it over to you?"

"Of course. Ninety thousand of it, anyway. You can keep ten as my wedding present to you and Bert. I'll stay here under cover till you collect. I want it in cash. And when I've got it, I promise you I'll go away and stay away. Just as though I was really dead. Is it a deal?"

"No," said Flo. "I won't do it, Jim."

"Why not? It's a beautiful setup for both of us."

"Because it's about the sickest scheme you've ever hatched. It's sick and dirty and—and criminal!" She started to get up. I waved her back.

"Wait a minute," I said earnestly. "Think about it. The only way you'll ever get rid of me and marry Bert is to keep quiet about me being alive and to claim that insurance. You know why? Because I involved *you* in this swindle up to your pretty neck, baby, and don't you forget it. If you blow the whistle on me, you blow it on you and Bert, too. Don't you understand that?"

She looked blank-eyed at me for a minute, then she said, "I'll think it over and let you know."

"When?"

"By tomorrow. You're staying here at this motel?"

I nodded. "Room 326."

"I'll call you." She stood up and left without another glance at me. I hadn't any doubt what her decision would be, knowing how much she wanted Bert and how anxious she was to get rid of me. She hadn't even tasted her vodka and tonic, so I drank it for her.

True to her word, she telephoned me at the motel about 10:30 the next morning. I was still in bed, catching up on my rest after the long drive from Pittsburgh.

"Jim?" she said when I answered the phone sleepily. "I've decided."

I propped myself up against the headboard of my bed with my pillow.

"Good," I said, "I trust you've decided to be sensible and play along with me?"

"Until half an hour ago, yes."

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"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I changed my mind then, that's all."

"What changed it?"

"Well, I got this telephone call long-distance from Pittsburgh," she said.

At the word I froze. "Pittsburgh?"

"Yes. From a police detective named Robeson. He seemed very polite and nice, I thought." She was baiting me.

"What did he call you about, Flo?"

Her tone turned malicious. "He asked if I was Mrs. James B. Carey and when I said yes, he told me he had some wonderful news for me, just the way you did yesterday."

I forced a laugh. "Don't tell me they've found my murderer already?"

"No. That wasn't the good news, Jim," said Flo quietly. "The good news was that you're not dead."

"What!"

"You heard me. This detective told me my brother must have made a mistake when he identified that dead man in Pittsburgh as my husband, James B. Carey."

"A mistake!" I repeated stupidly. I tried to think where I could have gone wrong. "What mistake?"

"Well, it seems that this morning the Pittsburgh police got a fingerprint check from the F.B.I. which definitely identifies the dead man as an AWOL navy seaman named Barrett."

I was stunned. "Nobody in Pittsburgh said anything about a fingerprint check! You mean they sent the dead man's prints to Washington *before* I identified him?"

"It seems so. Standard procedure, I understand, for unidentified corpses." Flo was enjoying herself.

I settled back weakly against my pillow and tried to keep calm. "So what did you tell detective Robeson?" I asked.

"What could I tell him except the truth? I told him that you left home last Friday to drive to Pittsburgh to your class reunion at Carnegie-Mellon. I told him I hadn't heard a word since you left, so I hadn't the faintest idea that I was supposed to be a widow. And I told him that since I was an only child, I've never in my life had a brother, let alone one named Norcross Smith."

I could feel a small snake of panic beginning to uncoil in my belly. "Why didn't you go the whole hog, darling, and tell Detective Robeson where to find me? Or *did* you?" The panic was growing.

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"No, I didn't tell him that. But not because I felt sorry for you, believe me. I kept quiet about you being here because this way I can at last be sure of getting a divorce from you, Jim"—her voice took on the ring of triumph—"on grounds of desertion."

My mind was already examining options. Probably Mexico City would be best. "Desertion?" I echoed.

"Yes, desertion, darling. You can't very well *not* desert me now, can you? Unless you want to hang around and stand trial for vehicular murder and conspiracy to defraud your insurance company." Even over the phone I could tell Flo was smiling. "So how does that grab you, darling?"

"Consider yourself deserted," I said, "as soon as I get dressed. I hope you will be as unhappy with Bert as you've been with me."

"Why, thank you, Jim. Where will you go?"

"Someplace where the police won't find me."

"Such as?"

"To Outer Mongolia," I said bitterly, "or Timbuctu, maybe? Where would *you* suggest I go?"

"How about hell?" Flo said, and hung up with a crash that nearly broke my eardrum.

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DEAD MAN'S HONOR

by JOHN F. SUTER

There was one precept that was given to me by both my father and my Uncle Abner, a precept I never forgot: I must treat the poor with the same respect due anyone else.

"That man might be as good as you are," my father said, "but less fortunate."

To condescend to the poor, said Abner, would be to shame my Maker.

Yet neither of them failed to distinguish between the poor and those who were known as "trash." These others, Abner pointed out, were those who were despised, not only by their friends but by their brothers, as well . . .

Our supply of coffee was nearly gone, and I was in McClung's store buying more for my mother. When I had paid my money, Gordon McClung raised a wiry finger.

"Wait, Martin," he said. "Let me show you something."

He went to the other end of the counter and bent his skinny bald head as he opened the postal drawer. McClung's was not only a general store, it was our post office.

He drew out some colored bits of paper and laid them on the counter.

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"Know what these are? Something new. Postage stamps. From now on I don't write on the outside of a letter that you've paid postage. These are coated with mucilage on the back. You just wet 'em and stick 'em on the envelope."

"Could I look, too?" a voice behind my left shoulder asked.

The storekeeper looked up. "Oh, hello, Foster. No reason you couldn't."

I looked around. Standing just behind me was Foster Jackson, whose family lived only a little higher than the poverty level.

I looked down at the stamps. I could tell that there were two different types, so I moved to one side to let Jackson see better.

"Look," McClung pointed out, "there're two different kinds. One sells for five cents and has Mr. Franklin's picture on it. The other costs ten cents and shows General Washington."

"I want to see General Washington," Jackson said. "We owe a lot to him."

"We owe a lot to Mr. Franklin, too," McClung said. "It's just that most people don't realize it."

Jackson shook his head. "What I meant was, my family owes a lot to the General. My granddaddy fought under him, and the General saw to it that his old soldiers got a grant of land. That's where mine come from, and we'll never give it up."

While Jackson was poking at the Washington stamp with his cracked and callused fingers, I addressed McClung.

"Why are there two different stamps?"

He shrugged. "If your letter contains only one sheet, it's five cents. Two sheets, it's ten cents."

"But you could use two five-cent stamps, couldn't you?"

His wide mouth split in a grin. "True. I'd say they couldn't decide who was most important, Mr. Franklin or General Washington. They ended by putting the picture of each one of 'em on a stamp."

"I'd have no trouble deciding," Jackson said. His voice was thin, but proud. "Mr. Franklin might have been a good man, but he could never match the General. No, indeed. You know what they call him—'the father of his country'."

I knew Foster Jackson for a good man, although he and his family were dirt poor. As he had said, he owned 120 acres of good land, but it almost seemed as though the hand of God had turned against him. One year his corn crop looked to be good, then a blight came, and he lost it all. He tried to raise beef cattle, and an unusually hard winter killed all his calves. He had eight lovable children, but

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they were intermittently sick. The time they might have spent helping with chores was devoted to caring for each other.

Because of these different problems, Jackson let his pigs run wild on his property, which was plentifully supplied with nut-bearing trees. Nobody faulted him for this, for some farmers more prosperous than he did the same thing.

Yet Jackson and his wife, Sarah, were never defeated by life. A man of average height, his shoulders had become permanently stooped by the age of 40, now five years behind. In lean times he could never have lived off his fat, for he had none. Still, he was quick to smile, and not one of the ten of them ever went in rags. His equally careworn wife saw to that with her mending. Her own smile was slower to appear than it once had been, but she had never forgotten how to use it.

Jackson and I both pushed the stamps back to McClung and thanked him. Then, as I turned away, the storekeeper spoke to Jackson.

"Before I forget, Foster, there's a letter for you."

I ignored what followed because I was interested in some new changes in gear for draft horses. I lingered over this display near the front door, fingering the leather and the buckles. By the time I had gone out and down the front steps, I had forgotten Jackson.

Behind me, I heard the door open quickly and bang shut.

"Martin, just a minute."

I stopped. It was Jackson again.

He hurried up to me, his letter in his hand. Out in the sun I realized for the first time that he looked bad, almost used up.

He extended the envelope to me.

"Would you read this to me, Martin? Please."

When I hesitated, he went on. "I can't. I never learned."

I still made no move to take it. I did not want to intrude on an older man's business.

He guessed this. "It's all right. Your father would do it. So would your Uncle Abner. You're all good people. So's Gordon McClung, for that matter, but he runs a store . . ." He thrust out the envelope again. "I trust you."

"You open it, anyway," I said.

Jackson nodded and opened the letter for me. It was on good paper. The hand was beautifully legible, and I could read it easily.

"It's from somebody in Uniontown, Pennsylvania," I said.

Jackson squinted. "That would be the fellow who has inherited

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the Sheridan place, next to me. A cousin of theirs. Name's Nicholson. Paul Nicholson, I think."

I looked at the signature. "Peter Nicholson."

Then I read the letter. It was two pages long. Nicholson said that he was informed that Jackson owned 120 acres of land next to the 412 acres he had inherited when his cousin died. Jackson's land was quite fertile, and it clearly was not being used to best advantage. Would Jackson be willing to sell?

If Jackson would be interested, Nicholson would offer him a price of twenty-five cents an acre. Moreover, if Jackson's family wanted to remain on the land, they could rent the house they now occupied, for a sum lower than any other landlord would charge. Nicholson would also consider hiring Jackson or any of his family. Pay would be based on the ability and willingness of the person hired.

When I finished reading, Jackson stood silent. I folded the letter and handed it back.

"There's some thinking needs to be done," Jackson said, taking the letter.

I was not one to offer advice. I said nothing.

"I could use the money," the man said slowly, "but it would melt away before I'd know it. Rent—things we'd be tempted to buy—"

He lifted his head. He was speaking to me, but his thoughts were somewhere else.

"A long way back one of my people came to this country as a bound boy. It took him a long time to work out his service, but he did. Then I guess something happened to him. He didn't seem to have much left inside. More than that, those of us who followed in his line didn't, either. They all meant well, but what they needed must have been bought out of that ancestor, before their time.

"Why, my granddaddy was no more than a hostler when they started to fight for independence under General Washington. But he got us our land."

He stared at the ground. "It's only fair that I talk this over with Sarah. Maybe even Matthew. He's just a little older than you. I guess you know."

He looked at me again. This time we both knew where he was. "But if I can, I intend to hold on to my land. Some day somebody in my family will measure up to it."

He mumbled a few more things of no importance, ending by saying that he might get Mr. King, the schoolmaster, to write an answering letter. Then he told me goodbye.

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That was the last time I saw Jackson alive.

My father was working at another part of the farm when I came home, and I had to put the hay mow in order. I didn't see him until late afternoon. Uncle Abner was with him when I came back to the house.

I told them about the letter, knowing that the matter would go no further.

My father listened gravely.

"I understand his feelings," he said. "The man has pride—not false pride, but the genuine kind. Many of the veterans of the Revolution sold their land as soon as they were given title."

"He might come to regret either decision he makes," Abner commented. "I have heard of Nicholson. If Jackson sells to him, he might be forced to change his house, in spite of what the letter offers. Nicholson might come to consider it an unfit dwelling, as an excuse. As for hiring out, this might cost Jackson more than he gets paid."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Work," my uncle replied. "It might not be ordinary work. It might be work that would not be required of even a slave."

"Then he shouldn't agree to the offer," I said.

"On the other hand, if he refuses to sell, Nicholson will still be his neighbor. Jackson's fences might somehow have some rails come down, letting his cattle stray across into the wrong pastures. After the third time, perhaps, they would be shot and butchered for beef for Nicholson's table. The same thing could happen to his pigs. They are wild enough to provide an excuse."

"Perhaps you should talk to him," my father said.

"I have no wish to offer unwanted advice, Rufus," Abner replied. "The decision is his. However, if I merely point out the possibilities, he might not resent it. There should be no harm in that."

It was known that Foster Jackson mailed a letter a few days later, but what was in it was not revealed. Schoolmaster Donald King must have written the letter, but he never discussed what anyone told him to write. If he had, no illiterate person would ever trust him.

Almost two weeks to the day after I had last seen Jackson, he died suddenly. Old Dr. Storm said that a swift-moving pneumonia was the cause, brought on by a generally weakened condition in the man's body. None of Storm's skill was of any avail when Sarah Jackson called to him for help.

There was some surprise among those who knew Jackson when

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a certain rumor was heard just following his death.

It was being told that Adam Bird, who was to conduct the funeral service, asked Sarah if her husband was to be buried on the family land.

"No," she is supposed to have answered, "he will be laid in the cemetery below Baird's Ridge. A burial on our land would not be a good thing now."

A little more than a month after the funeral Abner was visited by one of Randolph's servants. Randolph wished to have Abner present in his office early the following afternoon. If that could not be arranged, he wanted to know when Abner could be there.

"What does he want?" Abner asked the man.

"He must examine Miz Jackson," the servant replied. "He prefers you for a witness."

The request caught my uncle's interest. Virginia law of the time required that, when property was transferred and one of the parties was a woman, she must be examined by a person qualified to swear that she was not being coerced into entering into the transaction. The examiner could be a notary, a judge, or a justice, as Randolph was. While a witness was not necessary, witnesses were often present, to give the woman as much fair treatment as possible. The examination was conducted without the presence of any other person involved.

"Tell Squire Randolph," Abner said to the man, "that I accept his invitation for tomorrow."

On the following afternoon Abner was at Randolph's house, in his office, waiting for Sarah. There was concern on Randolph's florid face.

"Abner," he said, "how is this woman to survive? And her children? Foster Jackson was no tower of strength, but he managed to keep them together."

"It may be that the strength was shared," said Abner.

"Abner, except for the children, she has no one."

"That is not true, and you know it," Abner said.

Randolph gestured impatiently. "I know your thinking, Abner. Let me say that I have never encountered their protector in the flesh."

He studied Abner shrewdly. "Unless—"

My uncle remained silent.

"Some day," Randolph said finally, "you will extend your responsibilities."

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"Not ninefold," Abner replied.

The discussion went no further. There was a knock at the door, and Randolph's man showed Sarah Jackson in.

She was a small woman in her early forties. Adversity had not drained as much from her as it had from her husband, but she had paid more of a price than had her neighbors of better means. Once she had been known as a bright-haired, apple-cheeked girl with twinkling blue eyes. Now her hair had darkened and tarnished; the apples of her cheeks had lost juice and shrunk; her eyes were still blue, but there was a wariness in them.

Yet she had not lost the ability to smile, and smiling she was when she entered Randolph's office.

When greetings were acknowledged, Randolph seated her in a captain's chair he kept beside his desk. It was his belief that it was the most comfortable seat in the room.

"Sarah," he said in preliminary, "let me review some of the things you told me, for Abner's benefit. Foster did leave a will?"

She bobbed her head. "Yes."

"We need not go into everything in that will. However, he did clearly bequeath to you, and the children after you, the Jackson land. By that I mean the land on which you live. Did he do that?"

"He did."

"And you are here in regard to that land?"

"I am."

Randolph spoke quietly, without condescension. "What do you have in mind?"

"I want"—she paused to swallow—"to sell it."

"All of it, or part of it?"

"All of it."

Randolph leaned forward. "Who is the buyer?"

"Mr. Peter Nicholson."

"Ah, yes," said Randolph. "I had heard that he is visiting here, at the Sheridan place—his place, now. Very well. Did you approach him about a sale, or did he approach you?"

She smoothed the black widow's dress she wore. "He sought me."

"Did he make you a fair offer for the land?"

Sarah Jackson looked down at her hands, which were covered with black cotton gloves. "I don't know what a fair offer would be."

"Times have not been prosperous in recent years," said Randolph. "Land could bring as little as twenty-five cents an acre, or as much as a dollar."

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"For that land I should say a dollar an acre," Abner remarked.

"What was his offer?" Randolph asked.

"He will give fifty cents. But," she said, plucking at the fingers of her gloves, "that was the price Foster told him he'd take in the letter."

Randolph exchanged a surprised look with Abner. "Foster gave Nicholson a price in a letter?"

"Yes," Sarah answered, "Mr. Nicholson wrote to him to find out if he wanted to sell. We discussed it, then Foster answered the letter."

"I see," Randolph said.

"Did the reply tell the things you discussed?" Abner asked.

She looked at him, opening her mouth, then closing it. "No," she said finally. "It was different."

"How do you know that?" Abner asked.

"Mr. Nicholson showed it to me. He came to see me on the day after Foster died. If you want to examine it, he loaned it to me for that purpose."

She had been carrying a folded bit of cloth. She unwrapped this cloth and drew out a stamped envelope which she handed to Randolph.

Randolph took the envelope and removed a sheet of paper. He opened this and scanned it.

"Let me read this to you, Abner," he said in a moment, "then you may examine it for yourself."

He began to read, omitting only the date and address.

My Dear Sir,

I have received your letter of September 4th. You have expressed an interest in buying my land, which totals 120 acres. The price you have offered me is twenty-five cents an acre. This is regardless of the quality of the land.

I have considered your offer, and I have seriously thought of the sale of this property. I have been advised that all of my acreage is good fertile land and is worth a higher price. I would sell the entire tract to you for fifty cents an acre.

Yr. obedient servant,
Foster T. Jackson

"It is signed with an X, his mark."

Randolph laid the letter on the desk. "It would seem to be a clear expression of his intention."

Abner pulled at his beard. "He denied Nicholson's implication

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that some of the land might be of little value. That was good."

He turned to Sarah. "Of course, we all know that Foster did not write this. You will forgive me, Sarah, if I say that he could not have written it. We do know that he went to King for help, and King would have composed it and written it out. But he would not have set down anything counter to Foster's wishes."

Realization struck Randolph. "I promised to let you read it, Abner, and I haven't done so."

"I am sure you read exactly what is there," Abner replied. "However, let me see it, to satisfy the requirements of this meeting."

He rose and took the letter and envelope from the desk. He glanced briefly at the envelope.

"George Washington. Foster's hero. He would have approved your husband's wish to get a better price than the first offer."

He stood reading the page. "King writes a fine hand," he commented. Finally he folded the page and returned it to the envelope. He gave it back to Randolph.

"It is exactly as you read it."

Randolph addressed Sarah Jackson again.

"Do you want to sell this land, Sarah?"

She looked at him with troubled eyes. "I don't know how the rest of us could take care of it the way it needs to be cared for. Matthew is a good boy, but he should be a little older. What do you advise?"

Randolph shook his head. "We aren't here this afternoon to offer advice, Sarah."

Her hands were busy in her lap. She looked at Randolph, then at Abner.

"I don't *want* to sell," she said. "I feel that Matthew might be the one to succeed with this property. But Foster has committed us in his letter, and I feel that I have to do what he wanted."

"The land is yours now," Abner said. "If you want to keep it, you can. You can get help from several of your neighbors on caring for your property until Matthew is older."

"I'm sure that you speak the truth," Sarah said. "All the same, it would go against Foster's honor if I went contrary to what he agreed."

Randolph looked at Abner over the top of her head. The justice's fleshy face bore an expression of exasperation and sympathy. Abner was tugging gently at his beard with his big right hand.

"Sarah," Abner said, "there are several ways both of us could counsel you, and there is an offer I can make. However, you have

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raised the matter of Foster's honor."

"The primary matter is what is best for the family," Randolph said stiffly. "Honor is all very well, but it should not be enforced by a dead hand."

"I think," said Abner, "that it is not being imposed by a dead hand."

Randolph was shocked. "Abner," he said, an edge of anger in his voice, "do you suggest that Sarah is trying to deceive us?"

"Not at all," Abner replied. "If I understand the intent of this meeting, she needs only to convince us that she knows what she is doing."

"And you think she does not?"

"I think things are involved that she is not aware of."

"Do you know them?"

"No," said Abner. "They must be discovered, if they exist."

Randolph pondered. "It might be wise for us to meet again."

Abner addressed them both. "I suggest a meeting here in three days' time. If possible, we should also have present Peter Nicholson, Donald King, and my nephew Martin."

"We could make it Saturday morning," Randolph suggested. "Sarah?"

"I can be here."

"Then," said Randolph, busily writing in a ledger, "I must immediately give notice to Nicholson and King. I trust you to bring Martin, Abner."

The six of us met on Saturday. It was a bright morning. Randolph had planned this room for his office because it faced south and gave him the light he most often needed. On this day there was no corner for darkness to hide.

I already knew schoolmaster Donald King. He was a lean man of average height, supple and strong as a whip. Under a shock of stiff, brown hair, his eyes gleamed with intelligence. He preferred to teach by persuasion and example, but his authority was unmistakable.

I studied the unfamiliar man, Nicholson, with more curiosity, remembering Abner's earlier criticism. We were going to have to accept his presence on the Sheridan land, regardless of the outcome of his offer to Sarah Jackson.

In appearance he belied the rumors of harshness and close dealing. He was a small fair man, perhaps in his middle thirties, with fine,

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pale hair and very light blue eyes. He seemed quick of movement, and he smiled often, but only with his mouth.

When we were all assembled and settled, Randolph seated himself at his desk and cleared his throat. "I have asked you here," he said, "to try to resolve some questions about Foster Jackson's intentions regarding his land."

Nicholson spoke up quickly. "Mrs. Jackson has a letter that her husband wrote to me about this."

"I have read the letter," Randolph said. "That is one of the things we must discuss."

Nicholson glanced at Sarah Jackson. "There must be complications which that letter did not cover."

Abner spoke up. "When that letter was written, there were no complications."

Nicholson measured Abner with his eyes. "Then the sooner I hear what they are, the sooner I can deal with them."

Abner inclined his head briefly, then turned to Sarah. "Randolph has given me permission to speak to you out of turn, Sarah. I make you an offer. This has nothing to do with matters between you and Nicholson. It should not influence your decision about his desire to buy your land.

"This is my offer: I will buy your land at ten cents an acre, for a total price of twelve dollars for the 120 acres. This is forty-eight dollars less than Nicholson's offer. If you accept, I agree to rent it to you for whatever money you can pay me each year. This rent will be used to buy back the land. Payment can be in meat or produce, if you wish, and I will credit you with the value of what you give me. At the end of five years I will determine what you still owe. If the debt is paid or lacks only a small amount of being paid, the land will be deeded back to you.

"Further, my nephew Martin will spend some time each week teaching your son Matthew the proper ways to work the land, tend your livestock, and do the carpentry needed to keep your buildings and fences repaired. When Matthew has sufficient skill of his own, Martin will no longer do this."

She was about to answer, but my uncle stopped her. "You must not be quick to judgment. Nicholson's offer might seem better to you."

Nicholson had been paying close attention. He shook his head. "The guile of the Serpent," he said in an awed voice. "You give me small advantage."

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"You have mentioned Jackson's letter," Abner said. "Is that no advantage?"

"I believe it is," Nicholson answered. "True, it is only an offer to sell, and there is no written acceptance from me. There is no written contract between us. However, I have been relying on a characteristic of you Virginians to permit me to purchase at the price Jackson stated."

"What characteristic?" Randolph asked.

"Your reputation for honor and honesty."

"I am pleased to hear that we are respected for that," said Randolph. "Go on."

"I am told," said Nicholson, "that the men of these parts will contract between each other with no more than a handshake, and that no other offer will be considered until the first one is refused. I never had a chance to deal with Jackson beyond an exchange of letters, but I am sure that he made his price in honesty. I offer his widow my acceptance in honesty. I hope that she will follow her husband's wishes and honor the contract."

Randolph addressed the widow. "Sarah?"

She was clearly distressed. "Am I to ignore Abner's offer?"

"Completely. This has only to do with how you feel about honoring Nicholson's attitude on Foster's letter."

She concentrated her attention on Randolph. "I don't want to sell him the land. Even before I came here this morning, I was against it. But Foster was a good man, and I feel that I would disgrace his memory if I did what he would not have done."

"If that were all," Randolph said, "there would be no reason why I should not issue the document showing that you are selling the land without coercion. However, I believe that Abner has some remarks to make."

"That is true," Abner said.

"Could you and Sarah discuss this privately?"

"We could," my uncle answered, "but it would be more useful to discuss it openly."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Uphold Foster Jackson's honor."

Nicholson's face lit with pleasure. "I thought it was already clear that his widow intends that, but I welcome your support."

"I do not support what you think her intention is. For that matter, she has not announced her final decision."

Nicholson gave a short laugh. "It is obvious that I don't understand

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what my ears have told me. I thought she intended to support what her husband offered to do."

"She would support that offer," Abner said, "even though it would be against her best interests. But Foster Jackson did not make that offer."

"Didn't make the offer?" Nicholson repeated. "Isn't that his letter I have loaned to his widow?"

"It is a part of it."

"It is all I have seen!"

"Perhaps," Uncle Abner said. He turned to me. "Martin, this is not a court of law, but I want you to tell the truth as though it were. Will you do this?"

"I will," I agreed.

"Did you read a letter for Foster Jackson just before his final illness?"

"I did. It was a letter from Mr. Nicholson."

"What did the letter say?"

I hesitated. To my surprise Nicholson spoke up.

"Go ahead, boy. There was nothing in it I'd want to hide."

I went ahead. "Mr. Nicholson wanted to buy the Jackson land. He offered twenty-five cents an acre. If he bought it, the Jacksons could stay as renters, if they wanted to. The Jacksons could stay to work for Mr. Nicholson, if they wanted that, too."

Nicholson cut in. "All of that's exactly what I said."

Abner clearly had not finished with me, but he spoke to Nicholson. "You offered twenty-five cents an acre, but you will pay Jackson's price of fifty cents an acre."

Nicholson's reply was genial. "I felt that it would ease the family's burden."

"You would pay that price because it is a bargain," Abner retorted. "It is worth more."

"Times are hard," Nicholson countered. "Land does not bring what it did a few years ago."

"This land will still bring twice what you would pay," my uncle said. He looked at me again. "When Foster heard the contents of the letter, what did he say?"

"He said he would talk to his family. He said he would get Mr. King to write a reply for him."

"Did he say what he wanted to do?"

"He said he would try to keep his land."

"The letter plainly says that he would sell," Nicholson inter-

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rupted. "He must have changed his mind."

"Perhaps," Abner said for a second time. He turned to the schoolmaster. "King, you wrote a letter to Peter Nicholson for Foster Jackson, did you not?"

Everyone turned to the man, whose face showed a lively interest in what was being said. "I did," he answered.

Abner held out a big hand, and Randolph placed the letter and envelope in it. Abner passed it to King. "Is this the letter you wrote for Jackson?"

The teacher studied the page. "It is part of it."

"Part of it?"

"This is the first page. There was a second page."

Nicholson interrupted again. "This is all I received. Besides, Jackson signed it. You can see that."

"He signed the second page," King said.

"Then he must have discarded the second page and signed the other," Nicholson argued.

"He could not," King said. "After I had read it to him, and he put his X on it, I sealed it for him and posted it. I was going by McClung's, and he was not."

"King," said my uncle, "you write a beautiful, legible hand."

"It is a useful talent," the teacher said.

"Is your memory as good?"

"It is good enough."

"Do you remember exactly what Jackson's letter said on the second page?"

King thought long before replying. Finally he answered. "It was a continuation of something he began on the first page. This was how it read, after the first paragraph:

"I have considered your offer, and I have seriously thought of the sale of this property. I have been advised that all of my acreage is good fertile land and is worth a higher price. I would sell the entire tract to you for fifty cents an acre if I could bring myself to sell it at all. This is something I cannot do.

"I regret, sir, to inform you that this land is not for sale at this time.

"Then he signed it."

There was silence when the teacher finished speaking.

Then Sarah Jackson broke it with a loud cry. "I knew it! That is what we agreed! Abner, if your offer is still made, I accept it."

Abner held up his hand. "It is not finished."

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"Why should there be more?" Nicholson demanded, his face dark with anger.

"We must have it," Abner said. "Martin, when Jackson showed you the first letter, what was your impression? What was the letter's appearance?"

I answered as best I could. "It was good paper. And it was easy to read."

"Easy to read? Could you say that any other way?"

Still trying, I said, "It was nice to look at. Pretty."

My uncle nodded. "Pretty. Nice to look at." He turned to King. "King, I have said that you write a beautiful hand. That is one reason you are asked to write letters. Can others write in similar fashion?"

"Yes," the teacher acknowledged. "It's a taught thing. I did not originate it. It's a style I have learned, and others have learned it."

"A man's writing would be less individual if he followed this style? This style would be easy to copy, would it not? A man with a steady hand might even draw it, instead of writing it?"

"All those things are true," King admitted.

"Something of the sort might have happened in Jackson's letter," said Abner. "The first page stopped at a convenient place, and there is plainly room at the bottom to add a closing and a signature."

"It is possible," King said.

"Are you accusing me of forgery?" Nicholson demanded. "I defy you to prove it!"

"I have no intention of proving it," my uncle said. "You spoke earlier of the guile of the Serpent. I possess no such trait, although it must be familiar to you."

"Then," Nicholson almost shouted, "why was this not discussed privately? Why make it such a public thing? It's not good to blacken a man's name."

"It was done this way to let some honest people know you for what you are. I know that Foster Jackson mailed you a letter two pages long, and I can prove that."

Nicholson pointed to King. "By the word of a man who pretends to quote a mythical second page from memory? A rascal who is in league with you to get the land for yourselves at a ridiculous bargain? What did you pay him?"

"Why," said Abner, "King has received no money from me for any of this. But he was paid."

"You admit it!"

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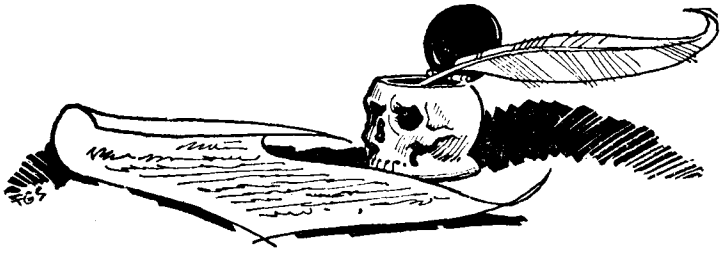
"I admit that Foster Jackson paid him. Ten cents."

Uncle Abner held up the envelope. "King made no charge for his effort. However, you can see that Jackson paid him ten cents to buy the George Washington stamp. That is how I knew there were two pages. If there had been only one, Mr. Franklin's stamp would be here. Five cents."

"He overspent by five cents," Nicholson growled.

My uncle's voice vibrated with indignation.

"That is the one thing he never would have done. He was too poor to waste even one penny."



DETECTIVERSE

MORE FOR HIS MONEY

by WILLIAM F. SMITH

Said a sad counterfeiter named Jake,
"I print five-dollar bills that, though fake,
Can fool even the law.
There is only one flaw:
They cost me six dollars to make."

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a *NEW* short story by

DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

In which a precocious fifteen-year-old, namely Thomas MacIntosh Gordon III, decides to write a term paper on the subject, "The Devil and All His Works," and how, in a most unexpected place, young Thomas finds old Lucifer at his never-ending machinations . . .

THE DEVIL AND HIS DUE

by DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

Thomas MacIntosh Gordon III was learning a great deal about the devil, especially for someone about to turn fifteen. He had chosen as his subject for a Religious Studies term paper, "The Devil and All His Works." The reason he chose the devil—as opposed to such possibilities as St. Francis of Assisi (at least four of his classmates chose St. Francis), the Augustinian Hermits, the Spanish Inquisition, Savonarola, or John Knox, was the premonition of boredom as he pondered them. His religious instructor sanctioned his choice for the same reason: there was no more disruptive influence at St. Christopher's Preparatory School in east Manhattan than Thomas MacIntosh Gordon III when he was bored.

Thomas had to have special letters from both the school and his parents in order to gain access to the rare books he wished to see at the New York Public Library and the Morgan Library. The permissions having been granted at the top, the staffs extended him the privileges of a scholar. He accepted gravely and concentrated with all his might. But sometimes, to ease the feeling of gravity, he would stop off at one or another of the Fifth Avenue bookstores to search out more modern literature giving the devil his due. Most of it couldn't hold a candle to the ancients, but one day, at Glasgow's,

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he discovered something that quite enchanted him—an exquisitely illustrated new edition of Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony.*

There remained until this time, which was not so very long ago, a cozy, old-world atmosphere to Glasgow's. Customers and non-customers alike browsed undisturbed by the sales personnel. A few were disconcerted now and then by the cold eye of Frank O'Reilly, the store detective. He retired last year and uniformed security guards took over, putting an end to an era as well as to a man's career.

Frank was not popular on the floor. To him every browser was a potential thief, and according to Miss Murray, whose seniority equaled Frank's, he had scared off more buyers over the years than thieves. His eyes glowing, his breath a mixture of whiskey and cloves, he pushed among the customers like a pouter pigeon, bumping them out of his way rather than lose sight of a subject under surveillance. Many an order was abandoned on the way to the cash register because of Frank, and the story is told of the time Miss Murray turned on him after one such abortion and flung every book in the order at his head. Frank stood his ground stoutly, merely removing his bowler hat to protect it under his arm.

There were not many customers in the store when Frank first noticed Thomas. The boy caught his attention by glancing slyly around to see if anyone was watching him. Frank dropped his eyes before Thomas' reached them. When Thomas went back to the book, Frank sized him up: a well-dressed, sassy-looking lad, small for his age, no doubt, given to reading in corners when he should have been on the football field; cunning too, Frank decided; he wore a private-school blazer and a cap. He'd have money in his pocket which would only reinforce his larcenous impulses. He put Frank in mind of the youngsters old Mr. Glasgow had used to hire when he was running the store; he required only that they came of good family and had passed their sixteenth birthday, and he wouldn't have cared about that except for the law. The union shop put an end to the practice.

Frank sidled down the aisle and surreptitiously glimpsed the book the youngster was into—drawings of nude women and the horny heads of animals among them. For a respectable bookstore Glasgow's had some of the damnedest things right out where any school child could feast his greedy little eyes on them. There'd be a hot time in the locker room if he popped something like that out of his duffelbag, and if he could boast of having snitched it—what an example that

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to his chums! It would be far better for the boy in the long run to be caught in the theft of it. And not bad for Frank O'Reilly to whom a little thief was better than none. He retreated to the Sports and Wildlife section and took up his vigil, rather like a hunter in the blind.

Bradford Pope observed the scene from the balcony where he was waiting for old Mr. Glasgow to come with the key. Pope had the look of the diplomatic service about him—a European cut to his clothes, a school tie you felt you ought to recognize, and shoes polished to a gloss. He wore his graying hair in a crest to camouflage a barren stretch of scalp. His hand dangled languorously over the railing, and his dark eyes, while quick, were limpid.

When the boy looked up at him he smiled, meaning to convey a knowing sympathy. What he wanted was the boy to stay where he was and to continue to hold the security man's attention, something the boy seemed quite unaware of. The youngster blushed guiltily and averted his eyes. Pope was delighted; he had been about the boy's age himself when he stole his first book.

Mr. Glasgow came along in that brisk, gingerly step of the aging wherein they resemble tightrope walkers which, indeed, they are. He no longer owned any part of Glasgow's, but he had been allowed to stay on and write his memoirs while presiding over what was left of the once-famous Old and Rare Department. He knew very well that he and Old and Rare would go out of Glasgow's together.

"I knew you'd be back, Mr. Bishop," he said. "Matter of fact, I had my secretary make out the authentication when you left me Friday."

"Pope, Bradford Pope, Mr. Glasgow."

"Yes, of course, as in Alexander." Mr. Glasgow selected his key from a ring chained to his belt. "I don't suppose you'd be interested in an 1866 copy of *Satires and Epistles?*"

Pope shook his head regretfully.

"Pity." The old man proceeded to one of the finely crafted glass-doored cases with which the balcony was lined at the turn of the century when Glasgow's moved uptown from lower Broadway.

Pope hung back until the case was opened. "Mr. Glasgow?" He beckoned him to the balcony rail and pointed out Thomas MacIntosh Gordon. "I may be wrong, but I suspect that lad is about to steal a book."

Mr. Glasgow leaned over the rail and scouted the floor until he spotted Frank O'Reilly. "Hadn't better," he said. Then, with an

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appraising look at Thomas: "Bright-looking chap, isn't he? In my day we put his sort to work. Didn't stop their thieving, but we got something in return."

Pope had thought he'd have more time. He regretted the banality of the next ploy and delayed it by a second or two, saying, "But isn't it reassuring in these times that someone his age cares enough about a book to want to steal it?"

Mr. Glasgow gave a dry grunt of assent.

"Excuse me, sir, but your shoelace is untied." Pope dropped to one knee at the old man's feet and pulled the lace loose before Mr. Glasgow realized what he was about. "Get up from there! I'm not so feeble that I can't tie my own laces."

Pope retreated toward the open case. "No offense, Mr. Glasgow," he said almost obsequiously.

"None taken." But the old face, still handsome despite the sagging, quivering jowls, was flushed. He lifted his foot, straining to conceal the effort, and planted it on the rail. He tied a double knot while he was about it.

Pope, knowing exactly where the book he wanted was, deftly plucked it from the shelf and slipped it into a pouch at his waist. It was a slender volume containing Richard Hooker's life of Izaak Walton, an extraordinary find, published within fifty years of Hooker's own lifetime. It would bring him thousands if he waited a bit. Or took sufficient care in making up a provenance. He leaped forward and caught the old gentleman's elbow when he teetered, off balance. Mr. Glasgow shrugged off his assistance, returned to the bookcase, and got out the Leyden edition of an Eighteenth Century medical handbook; it was the item they had discussed and bargained over on Pope's last visit.

"I've often wondered," Pope said the while, "why the Pilgrims pulled out of Leyden when they did. It's a mystery that's never been satisfactorily solved, you know."

"Won't find out here." The old man chortled and waved the medical handbook.

The moment Pope had smiled at him, Thomas knew the man was up to no good. He half expected to be sneakily beckoned up the stairs and hustled into some secret passage behind the bookshelves. Which was why he had looked away so quickly. He had been thoroughly instructed in how to repulse such an overture. But when the old man also came to the railing and Thomas felt himself the object of

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both their attentions, he wondered if Pope might not be a truant officer. People were always asking Thomas why he wasn't in school. He had composed several answers: "Don't you know it's St. Crispin's Day?" Or "Madam, I've been expelled for promiscuity." None of which he had ever used.

He returned to paging *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. The fact was, he was having trouble with his project: the devil had too many works. It occurred to Thomas he might more easily contain his subject if he approached the devil from the viewpoint of St. Anthony.

Miss Murray wandered down the aisle and rearranged a stack of books across the table from Thomas. She had in mind to discourage this youngster if he intended mischief which, plainly, Frank O'Reilly anticipated. Frank shook his fist at her when she threw him a hypocritical smile. A customer, waiting at the cash register, asked if someone in the store wouldn't mind taking his money. Miss Murray hastened back to her station.

Thomas opened the briefcase at his feet and took out pen and notebook. He carefully wrote down the title and author of the book that he might add it to his references. He also noted dates of publication and copyright, the text dated 1910. That set him to wondering just how Flaubert came to know what happened to St. Anthony who had lived in the fourth century. Flaubert had made it up, of course, which set Thomas to further thought on whether it might not be a sin to make up such things about a saint. He'd thought before about the viewpoint of St. Anthony. Flaubert, he decided, was a hypocrite, pretending to write about St. Anthony, when what he really wanted to write about was the devil. Thomas jumped when the phone rang on the post behind him.

The woman clerk came and identified herself as Miss Murray. "Yes, Mr. Glasgow," she said. "I'll be waiting for him."

Thomas followed her eyes to the top of the balcony stairs. There stood the man he had suspected of flirting with him. Very shortly he was joined by the old gentleman.

Mr. Glasgow had brought the Leyden book and its authentication along with the bill of sale which Miss Murray would process when Pope got downstairs. The two men shook hands. Pope had with him a certified check for $1512; it had all but cleaned him out. He ran down the steps, paused there and saluted the old gentleman watching at the top. As soon as Miss Murray took over, Mr. Glasgow retreated to his nook among the executive offices.

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Pope, to expand his air of casualness, pretended, in passing, an interest in the book which so absorbed Thomas. Thomas looked up at him icily. "Why aren't you in school?" Pope asked.

"Because I have the mumps," Thomas said.

Pope pulled in his neck, as it were.

Miss Murray, seeing the figure of Pope's purchase which, no matter how Bookkeeping dealt with it eventually, would appear with her initials on that day's register tape, began to hum to conceal her excitement. She made a mistake in punching the first digit and had to correct it.

"Miss Murray," Pope said, "hold on a moment, will you?"

Miss Murray remained crouched over the electronic keys, her fingers poised.

Pope moistened his lips. He was about to violate one of his basic rules: Don't get greedy. But the setup was irresistible. The youngster was putting something in his briefcase and the security officer, unnoticed by the boy, was so intent on him that he was actually on tiptoe, ready to take off after the youngster when he headed for the exit.

"I'm frightfully sorry if it's an inconvenience," Pope said, affecting a British accent which usually ingratiated him with elderly saleswomen, "but you know, I'd like another day to consider. I'm sure Mr. Glasgow will understand."

"I'm sure he will," Miss Murray said, shooting her teeth at him. The following day was her day off. She cleared the register, then locked it, tucked the invoice and the documentation within the book's cover, and left the floor to take the book back to Mr. Glasgow.

Thomas hadn't missed a step. He had already decided to follow the man out of the store on the chance of his committing himself to something not yet defined in Thomas' imagination. Thomas only knew that the man was wicked, a conviction best accounted for by his recent studies.

Pope waited until Miss Murray was almost up the stairs, then ambled into the Sculpture Department. It was a direct line from there to the Fifth Avenue exit. He gradually accelerated his pace.

Thomas grabbed his briefcase and ran after him, at which point every customer in the store, most of them in the Fifth Avenue wing, became aware that something was happening.

Frank O'Reilly was momentarily off balance, shocked at Miss Murray's leaving the floor without a word or a sign to him. He was sure that it was pure cantankerousness, her trying to prove that,

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left on his honor, the little savage would turn noble. The little savage, having dropped something into his briefcase, was galloping through Sculpture with it. Frank took a short cut behind the stairs. Up front, a woman screamed, "Stop thief!"

There was one in every crowd, Frank thought, someone doing his work for him. He could not make an arrest until the suspect got beyond the store premises.

As soon as Thomas heard the cry, "Stop thief!" he put things together approximately right, dead right in the conclusion that the man was on his way out of the store with a book he had stolen from the Old and Rare Department. Thomas paused long enough to call out to a clerk, "Call a cop, a policeman!"

"The store detective's right behind you, sonny."

"Thanks," O'Reilly said bitterly. There wasn't a clerk in the store who wasn't his enemy.

Thomas sprinted ahead. He caught up with Pope in the revolving door, hitting the door with enough force to send the unready thief reeling past the exit. O'Reilly, in the compartment behind Thomas, held the door back at that point, hoping to flush the boy outdoors: all he had to do was go, he was in the open. But Thomas had no intention of letting the thief get out of his sight. Pope was hung up like a bird in a glass cage.

Finally Pope braced himself, his back to the panel next to Thomas, and pushed. O'Reilly, surmising what he had in mind, yielded and the door slipped back a few inches; Pope was able to slither outdoors. He immediately collared Thomas and pulled him into the street where he delivered him into the detective's arms. He then intended to lose himself in the crowd that was gathering as though drawn by a magnet.

Thomas was not to be held. He wheeled his briefcase over his head and brought it up full force into O'Reilly's midriff. Frank let go of him and Thomas threw a flying tackle at Pope. He got him by the knees and brought him down. He hung on until Frank plucked him off and gave him over to the temporary custody of two willing bystanders. Frank helped Pope to his feet. Pope was swearing he would sue Glasgow's for the youngster's assault.

"You're as fine as new," Frank said heartily and brushed the dust of the street from Pope's suit. Thus did his hand come in contact with something that was unmistakably a book and in a place no man would ordinarily abide anything foreign to his person. Frank

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knew instantly he had caught a thief in spite of himself. When he saw Mr. Glasgow and Miss Murray conveying one another through the revolving door he caught onto the fact that the book must belong to Old and Rare. He clapped his hand on Pope's shoulder and pronounced a solemn arrest.

"Well done, Frank!" Mr. Glasgow cried. He had discovered the Richard Hooker missing when he returned the medical handbook to the shelf.

Pope surrendered the book. His one consolation was that he still had the certified check—at least he could post bail.

Mr. Glasgow noticed Thomas and remembered Pope's using him as a cunning decoy. "And the little ruffian—you got him too!"

"Me?" Thomas said, a squeak.

His captors took a tighter hold.

Pope, knowing to whom he owed his captivity, said in his best Cockney, " 'Is name is Oliver," and bared his teeth at Thomas in a sardonic grin.

"My name is Thomas MacIntosh Gordon, Third," Thomas declared loudly so that several people in the crowd whistled mockingly.

"Best let the boy go," Frank whispered to the man he still considered his employer. "We don't have much on him."

"I knew his grandfather," Mr. Glasgow said. "Or was it his great-grandfather? Shipbuilders. Started in the Clipper days, the *Mary Ellen,* if I'm not mistaken."

At a sign from O'Reilly, Thomas' captors set him free. He gathered his briefcase and his cap and said with haughty scorn, "You will hear from my lawyers."

Thomas never doubted that the devil had had a hand in what happened to him that day at Glasgow's. He was therefore the more determined to get on with his term paper, and certainly not to yield to the all but overwhelming temptation to switch subjects. He considered it a moral victory the day he turned the paper in. But that term Thomas, to whom straight A's were a commonplace, got the first C-minus of his academic career. In Religious Studies.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Captain Leopold, Lieutenant Fletcher, and Sergeant Connie Trent combine in a police procedural that is more straightforward than usual, but as usual has as many dead ends along the way. The investigation this time concerns a lady without a past; but in most detective stories involving murder it is the person without a future who paradoxically holds the stage, front and center . . .

THE WOMAN WITHOUT A PAST

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Judy Thomas was celebrating her twenty-eighth birthday, though in a way she'd been born only ten months earlier. She didn't like to think about that tonight, though—not when she was dancing with Carl and thoroughly enjoying herself.

Judy had met Carl Forrester less than a month after she moved to the city and took the job at the license bureau. He'd come in one day for a hunting license, and they'd started chatting. One thing had led to another and she'd gone out to dinner with him a few days later. Before she quite knew what was happening Carl Forrester had moved into her apartment with her.

She hadn't exactly been swept off her feet. It was more likely, she rationalized, that her loneliness in a strange city led her to accept the first offer of friendship and love that came along. When, after a few months, he suggested they pool their incomes and buy a small house together, it seemed like a good idea to her.

Carl was a salesman for a line of office furniture, and his income with commissions was far more than hers. But she was able to

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suggest a small mail-order business they could get into together, and it proved moderately successful. By the time they moved into a ten-year-old ranch home just inside the city limits, Judy felt that she was holding up her end of the deal. The house was in a quiet neighborhood of mainly retired couples, with few of the children and animals one might have found in a suburban subdivision. Judy fell in love with the house and the neighborhood, though for their own reasons they avoided most of the neighbors.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked as they returned to the table from the dance floor. The restaurant they'd come to for her birthday dinner was about a mile from home. It was a quiet place with good food.

"Thinking about? Us, I suppose."

"You're thinking we should get married."

"No," she insisted. "Nothing like that."

"I almost bought you a ring for a birthday gift."

"I'm not ready for marriage yet, Carl. There's so much about me you don't know."

"I'm four years older than you. I might have a few secrets too."

He asked for the check and they left the restaurant. The summer night was clear and moonlit, and they drove home with the car windows open. Judy felt the warm breeze on her face and decided this was just about the happiest she'd been. All this, she marveled, in only ten months. It was certainly better than Florida had ever been.

Carl turned the car into the driveway of their little ranch home. Though it was barely ten o'clock, many of the other houses on the block were already dark. The older people retired early.

"This is the nicest birthday I've had," Judy said.

Carl unlocked the front door. "It's not over yet."

He stepped into the darkened living room and Judy heard two sharp sounds a little louder than coughs. Carl Forrester stiffened and toppled backward.

Judy screamed once, frozen in terror, and then she saw the man step from the shadows. He stood looking at her, holding a long-barreled target pistol in his right hand.

She turned to run and made it out the front door just as the bullets caught her.

Judy Thomas was still sprawled in the doorway when Captain Leopold reached the scene. The man, Carl Forrester, was inside the

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house. "Both of them were killed instantly," Sergeant Connie Trent informed him. "Small-caliber bullets. It could be a professional hit."

"Let's keep that out of the newspapers. They do enough speculating on their own. What do you know about the victims?"

"Judy Thomas was a clerk at the license bureau downtown. The neighbors tell me Carl Forrester is a salesman of some sort, but they don't know where. Both of them lived here. They bought the house together about six months ago."

"People don't bother getting married any more."

"Some of them don't," Connie agreed.

"The neighbors hear anything?"

"The man across the street phoned the police. He's right over here."

An elderly man who walked with a slight limp came forward. "I'm Genner," he said simply. "I live across the street."

"What did you see, Mr. Genner?"

"First I heard it. Heard her scream just after they came home. I looked out the window and I saw her go down in the front door. She was trying to run out."

"Did you hear shots?"

"Guess I did, but they weren't very loud. Didn't realize till later that's what they were."

"Did you see the killer?"

"There was a man over here—I saw that much. He came out of the house after she fell down and ran into the bushes."

"Old or young?"

"I couldn't see his face, but he moved pretty fast. I'd say he wasn't too old."

"Black or white?"

"I told you I couldn't see his face. He was all in shadows."

"Did he run to a car?"

"I didn't see where he ran. He just went into the bushes."

"Have there been any recent robberies in this neighborhood, Mr. Genner?"

"Not lately. Not this year. We're peaceful here."

"Did you know Mr. Forrester and Miss Thomas well?"

"Hardly at all. They kept pretty much to themselves."

"No visitors, parties?"

"Not that I ever noticed."

"That's all for now," Leopold decided. "We'll be talking to you again."

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He left Genner on the sidewalk and followed Connie into the house. The bodies had been photographed and removed, and only a few curious neighbors still watched from across the street. "No sign of robbery," Connie told him. "A window at the back of the house was forced, but apparently the killer just sat and waited for them to return. Nothing seems disturbed."

"Sat and waited?"

"This chair by the window—you can see the cushion is depressed as if someone was sitting on it. And there's cigarette ash on the table. He took the butt with him but left the ashes."

Leopold sighed. "If only there really were a monograph on the distinction between the ashes of various tobaccos."

"Shall we start questioning the other neighbors?"

Leopold was prowling around the room, opening doors, inspecting closets. In one he knelt to open a large cardboard box. When he straightened up he answered Connie's question. "It's almost midnight now. Wait until morning to start on the neighbors. And ask Fletcher to check on the victims' backgrounds. I especially want to know where Forrester worked as a salesman."

"Why's that?" Connie asked.

"There are forty-eight cans of ether in the closet."

It was almost noon the following day before Lieutenant Fletcher came into Leopold's office. He looked unhappy as he settled into his favorite chair.

"You're not going to like this, Captain."

"What is it—the double murder on Magnolia Street?"

Fletcher nodded. "Judy Thomas has worked at the license bureau for ten months, ever since she moved to the city. Before that her life is a blank."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that—she has no past! Her employment records show she was born in Baltimore twenty-eight years ago, but there's no record of it down there. Her social security number was newly issued when she came here ten months ago. She listed no living relatives. And the Maryland company that gave her a reference doesn't seem to exist."

"Interesting," Leopold admitted. "What about her fingerprints?"

"Nothing on record here. We've sent them to Washington."

"How about the man—Forrester? Where does he work?"

"He sells office furniture for a midwest manufacturer. His terri-

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tory covers all of New England."

"You know we found a case of ether in the closet."

"Yeah."

"Unless they're using it for furniture polish these days, that seems a bit odd."

"I know some addicts who try mixing it with cocaine for an extra high," Fletcher said. "But they usually burn themselves up."

"Have Connie check on it. I want to know if any local addicts have been using ether. She still has some contacts from her undercover days."

"What about Judy Thomas?"

"Talk to her co-workers. She must have mentioned something about her past."

"I'll get right on it, Captain."

It was late afternoon when Connie Trent returned with her report. She was tired and footsore from calling on neighbors. "They didn't know a thing. It seems Genner was the only one who even spoke to the dead couple. I feel as if I've wasted the entire day."

"No, you haven't, Connie. Somebody had to do it. Did Fletcher ask what you knew about ether, other than its medical use?"

She nodded. "Using it as a drug is nothing new. Ether has been around since the thirteenth century, and its narcotic use by doctors and students dates from the late eighteenth century. It was regarded then as an effective substitute for alcohol, producing intoxication without a hangover. In fact, a little more than a teaspoon of ether is enough to make a person drunk."

"What would forty-eight cans do?"

"I can't imagine. Of course you know it's rarely used as an anesthetic any more because it's so inflammable. It has had brief spurts of popularity as an intoxicating drug, generally in countries where alcoholic beverages were in short supply—America during prohibition, and Germany during World War Two. Mixing ether with cocaine can be very dangerous as well as expensive, but it's still done in some circles. In fact, some head shops actually sell kits for it."

Before Leopold could respond, Fletcher hurried in. "Sorry to interrupt, but I thought you'd want to know about the fingerprint report from Washington, Captain."

"What did they say?"

"No record. They've nothing on her."

"Another dead end." Leopold scowled across the desk.

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"She must have a past somewhere," Connie argued. "She didn't emerge full-grown from an egg ten months ago."

"You think her past caught up with her?"

"I don't know," Connie admitted. "Maybe there was something in the man's past."

"One other thing," Fletcher continued. "I found the restaurant where they had dinner. Forrester had the credit-card receipt in his pocket. Their waitress said they were celebrating the woman's birthday."

By the following morning Connie had traced the case of ether to a firm that manufactured it as an industrial solvent. Carl Forrester had purchased it there earlier in the week, supposedly for use by his furniture company. Leopold decided it was time to call on the company's regional sales manager, who would have been Forrester's immediate superior.

Greg Porson was a younger man than he'd expected, still in his early thirties, and his office in a suburban shopping complex was obviously not designed to receive frequent visitors. Porson removed a stack of catalogues from a chair and motioned Leopold to have a seat.

"When I heard the news I couldn't believe it! Carl was one of my best salesmen. Was it a robbery?"

"There are no signs of robbery, but we're investigating every possibility," Leopold said. "Did you know the young woman, Judy Thomas?"

Greg Porson shook his head. "I knew Carl was living with someone, but I never met her."

"Do you know how he met her?"

"No."

"Did he ever say anything about her past?"

"Not that I remember. He was on the road a great deal and we didn't have an opportunity for any personal chats."

"Just what did Carl Forrester do for you?"

"Sold office furniture. Called on businesses all through New England. Mainly in large cities, of course. Our firm manufactures quality wood products—desks, chairs, credenzas. We also handle a line of metal filing cabinets, though we don't manufacture those ourselves."

"Do you have any use for ether, possibly as a solvent?"

"Ether? Certainly not in the selling end, and I doubt if it's used

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in the manufacturing process."

"Carl Forrester had a case of ether in the closet of his home."

"Strange."

"We thought so. Tell me, have any of your other salesmen had troubles like this—assault, or break-ins at their homes?"

"No. I only have two other people under me, and one of them lives in Boston. But I haven't heard of any trouble."

"Thank you for your time," Leopold said, rising to leave. "I may have more questions later."

"Any time," Porson said, walking to the door.

Leopold drove back to his office. If there was to be a break in the case, he hadn't yet seen any sign of it.

After lunch Fletcher reported more of the same. They'd been unable to trace Judy Thomas's whereabouts prior to her arrival in the city ten months ago. "What about this company that gave her a reference? Was the letter forged?"

"I've been checking on them," Fletcher said. "Mid-States Exporting. Their letter said she worked in the office for two years and did satisfactory clerical work. The company actually existed last year, but it seems to have gone out of business. The Baltimore police don't know anything about it, and anyway there's no trace of Judy Thomas having lived at the address she gave."

"But why would she fake a reference to get a job at the county license bureau? It certainly doesn't pay much."

"She handled various licenses and gun permits," Fletcher pointed out. "And even passport applications."

"Well, keep checking on it. And contact some of your underworld connections about the possibility of a robbery. I suppose there's still a possibility that the killer was a thief who was interrupted in his work and killed them both as he fled from the house."

"I don't like it, Captain. We know he sat and smoked a cigarette. And if he panicked at their unexpected return, why didn't he flee the way he'd come, through the open rear window? No, I don't think it was robbery. The killer was waiting for them."

The conversation was interrupted by Connie Trent. "Captain, there's a man outside to see you. Max Swann from the New York office of the Justice Department."

"What does he want?"

"He says it's about the Thomas-Forrester murders."

Leopold grunted. "Show him in. We'll finish this later, Fletcher."

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Max Swann was a darkly handsome man in his mid-thirties with raised black eyebrows that gave him a slightly startled appearance. He shook hands with Leopold and came right to the point. "Washington forwarded your routine request for a fingerprint check on a woman known as Judy Thomas."

"That's right. She was murdered a couple of nights ago, along with a man named Carl Forrester."

Max Swann nodded. "I checked the newspaper accounts. Any leads?"

"None."

"Those small-caliber pistols are popular with hit men."

"Why did Washington forward our fingerprint request to you, Mr. Swann?"

The dark-haired man shifted uncomfortably. "You understand I'm revealing this only because she's been murdered."

"I understand," replied Leopold, who didn't understand a thing.

"I'm assigned to the Justice Department's witness relocation program. As you must know, in recent years it's become one of our most potent weapons against organized crime."

Suddenly it was all clear. "That's why she had no past! Judy Thomas was a government witness and you gave her a new identity!"

"That's correct," Swann admitted. "Her real name was Sylvia Blount and she testified for the government in a big Florida narcotics smuggling case. Her ex-boy friend, a fellow named Earl Perez, got twenty years in prison, but he had lots of friends who swore they'd kill her. As is government policy in such cases, we resettled her and gave her a new identity. I handled her case personally."

"Tell me about her. What sort of woman was she?"

Max Swann shrugged. "Good-looking, a great personality—but she had the unfortunate gift of attracting the wrong sort of man. She was always hooking up with losers."

"Did you know Carl Forrester?"

"Not personally. I came up here to see Sylvia—Judy—a few months ago and she told me she was living with someone. But she liked her job and seemed to be happy."

"What about the phony references you furnished her?"

"You mean the Maryland company? That was a firm we set up a few years ago in a sting operation. It came in handy when we needed fake references."

"Did she tell you what Forrester did for a living?"

"Sold office furniture, I think."

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Leopold toyed with his pencil. "Do you think this fellow Perez's friends found her and killed her?"

"I don't see how, unless she got in touch with someone from her past. And why should she do that?"

"Why, indeed?" Leopold wondered. "Unless she'd gotten involved with drugs once more and needed someone's help."

"She swore to me she'd never do that again. I think she'd learned her lesson."

"She's certainly learned it now."

"When Washington identified those fingerprints they notified me and suggested I see if there's any way we can help the investigation."

"Indeed there is. We'll want a full list of Perez's friends and relatives—anyone who might have wanted her dead."

"I've brought you everything I have," Swann said, reaching into his pocket. "Here are names and addresses, as far as we know them."

There were a half-dozen names on the list, with addresses mainly in south Florida. Tying the killings to one of these people was going to be next to impossible, unless they got lucky with an informer.

"Can I call on you for help if I need it?" Leopold asked.

"Certainly. Here's my card. The office always knows where to reach me."

As Max Swann was leaving Leopold thought of one more question. "What sort of narcotics was Earl Perez smuggling?"

"A little of everything. Mainly cocaine."

Connie came in with some coffee from the machine in the hall, and Leopold told her about Max Swann's visit. "So she's not a woman without a past any more."

"No. Now all we have to figure out is which one of them was really the intended victim. Was the killer after Forrester or the girl?"

"Isn't she the logical one?"

"You're forgetting those cans of ether. Forrester bought them, so he may have been the target."

Connie Trent opened a manila envelope and shook it onto Leopold's desk. "This is what he had on him when he died. Here's something from his wallet that I missed before."

"What is it?"

"A receipt for a post-office box in the name of New-Art Apparatus Company."

"Check it out. Get a court order to open it up."

"Tomorrow?"

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"Right now."

There were four letters in the post-office box, all addressed to New-Art Apparatus. Three seemed to be in answer to magazine ads, enclosing checks for fifteen dollars for unspecified "kits." The fourth was from a local "head shop" dealing in drug paraphernalia, ordering a dozen of the "kits." Leopold decided a visit was in order.

He reached the Stay A-Head Shoppe just before six, and the short bearded young man behind the counter looked him over for a moment before saying, "We're just closin', mister."

Leopold flipped open his wallet. "You can stay open for me."

"What is this—a bust?"

"Not if you answer some questions. What's your name?"

"Rudy Vega. I just work here."

"You do the ordering?"

"No," he answered too quickly. "Well, sometimes. Look, this stuff isn't against the law. Not yet, anyway. Not in this state."

Leopold handed over the letter. "That's your name on this order form, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"What sort of kits are these?"

"Just some glass piping. Nothing much. Couple of bottles come with it."

"Bottles of what?"

"A little ether," he answered quietly.

"For mixing with cocaine?"

"We don't know what people do with it," Vega insisted.

"But Carl Forrester sold these kits to you?"

"Carl who? Naw, never heard of him. It was all done through mail order."

They went back to the house on Magnolia Street. This time Leopold and Fletcher had a better idea of what they were looking for, and they found it in a dark corner of the basement. Odd-shaped glass pipes and small bottles already bearing labels that read: *Caution: Highly Inflammable!*

"They were making the kits here," Fletcher decided. "And selling them by mail to head shops."

Leopold agreed. "And they were probably both in on it."

"So who killed them?"

"Someone from the present, or someone from the woman's past." Leopold picked up one of the empty bottles. "These were filled with

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small amounts of ether, but the buyer had to furnish his own cocaine for the mixture. There's nothing illegal in what they were doing."

"Think someone killed them to take over the business?"

"I doubt it, Fletcher. The thing just isn't that big. A few fifteen-dollar orders. Even if they made a ten-dollar profit on the kits it's still small change these days. Who'd commit two murders over a mail-order business that small?"

"They might have had contacts with cocaine dealers."

"It's possible."

"What's next, Captain?"

Leopold thought about it. "We have one advantage over the killer, if it is someone from the woman's past. He doesn't know we know about that past. In fact, the newspapers are just beginning to tune in to the fact that she doesn't have a past. If we could lure him back here for some reason, he'd probably feel safe in coming."

"How do we manage that?"

"Let's go call on that neighbor, Genner, across the street."

Mr. Genner listened quietly as Leopold spoke, nodding from time to time. Finally he said, "You want to set me up as a decoy for the killer."

"I wouldn't put it quite that crudely, Mr. Genner. Chances are he won't risk trying to get at you. But it's the only hope we have. Naturally you'll be well guarded. In fact, with your permission Sergeant Fletcher will stay right in the house with you at night."

"All right," he decided. "Go ahead. We have to do something to keep the neighborhood safe."

The following afternoon's paper carried a picture of Genner, together with a statement by Leopold that he was the only eyewitness to the killings. Genner said he felt certain he could identify the killer once the police apprehended him.

They waited a week and nothing happened.

The killing of Judy Thomas and Carl Forrester gradually faded from the press, replaced by newer violence. After a few nights at the Genner home, Fletcher turned the duty over to someone else, and after a week's time they prepared to abandon it altogether.

As Leopold pointed out, it had been a long shot at best. He'd phoned Max Swann twice during the week at his New York office, but the Justice Department had nothing new on the case. Swann had agreed to hold off any announcement of the dead woman's identity until they had tried Leopold's scheme, but as the week ended

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without results, both men were ready to give it up.

"Why don't you wait through the weekend?" Swann suggested. "If nothing happens by Monday I'll issue a statement announcing that the dead woman was in our witness-relocation program. There's always a chance that might uncover something new."

"Fair enough," Leopold agreed. "I'll phone you on Monday."

But on Sunday afternoon it was Max Swann who phoned Leopold at home. "We just got a tip that Earl Perez's brother Frank passed through New York on his way up to your city. This may be the break you've been waiting for."

"Do you have pictures of him?"

"Better than that. I can come up myself. I'll spot him for you."

Leopold phoned Fletcher and Connie and arranged to have the Magnolia Street block covered with plainclothes police. It would be difficult on a Sunday, when deliverymen and telephone crews didn't usually work, but he knew Fletcher would handle it. Next he called Mr. Genner and warned him to be on guard.

He picked up Max Swann at the railroad station in late afternoon. The dark-haired Justice Department man was nervous as he got in the car. "I hope you've covered everything, Captain. If Frank Perez is your killer, he's a dangerous man."

"Don't worry," Leopold said.

They drove to a spot about two blocks from the Magnolia Street address. It was dinnertime on a summer Sunday, and there was the odor of burning charcoal in the air. A bit of smoke drifted up from behind one house, and farther down the street a few boys were playing catch. A teenaged girl rode her bicycle along the sidewalk.

"He may not make his move until dark," Swann said.

"Probably not. We might have a long wait." He switched on the car's two-way radio. Then he asked Swann, "Did you bring a picture of Perez?"

The Justice Department man opened his briefcase and took out a blown-up candid shot of two men together on a street. "The one on the right is Earl. His brother Frank is on the left."

"Tough-looking customers."

"They certainly are. She must have been crazy to get tangled up with them." Swann took a revolver from the briefcase and slipped it into a holster on his belt.

As darkness fell over the neighborhood, a carful of Sunday visitors pulled away from one house with a few beeps of the horn. Leopold started the motor and followed them down Magnolia Street. "Oddly

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enough, two cars are less noticeable than one," he explained. They drove by the Genner house but all seemed quiet. There were lights on in the living room.

Leopold picked up the microphone, explaining, "I've got a direct connection to Fletcher in the house. Fletcher, can you hear me?"

"Sure, Captain."

"All quiet there?"

"You bet. Looks like another false alarm."

"We'll see."

Leopold circled the block and pulled into the driveway of a house that backed up to Genner's on the next street. "We've had people here all day," he explained. "We'd be too suspicious on the street after dark."

Connie Trent opened the door to admit them. "Looks like a long night, Captain."

"Afraid so. How many people do we have?"

"Eight. Two at each end of the street, Fletcher in the house, and the three of us here."

"Backups?"

"I can send a couple of joggers down the street for a one-shot. More than that would be suspicious."

Outside the streetlights were going on. "Send them," Leopold decided.

Suddenly Connie's radio crackled into life. It was Fletcher calling them. "A guy coming up the front walk with a delivery of flowers, Captain."

"On a Sunday night? That's him!"

Leopold hit the back door first, with Max Swann close behind. They jumped a low hedge and ran across Genner's back yard. Leopold already had his revolver out as they rounded the corner of the house.

The man with the flowers was just ringing the doorbell. Leopold recognized him from the photograph. It was Frank Perez. When he saw them he dropped the basket of flowers, exposing the long-barreled target pistol in his hand.

Leopold's hand was still coming up with his own gun when Max Swann reached around him and shot Frank Perez once in the left temple.

Lights were coming on and a few people were looking out their front doors, attracted by the shot and the sudden arrival of police cars from both directions on the street. Fletcher stepped over the

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fallen flower basket to examine the body of Frank Perez. "Nice shooting, Captain," he said.

"Swann beat me to it," Leopold admitted. "My reflexes must be slowing down."

"I was ready for him," Swann said. "I figured he'd have a gun out, to shoot Genner when he opened the door."

Fletcher peered at the fallen target pistol. "And with luck this'll be the same weapon he used across the street."

From somewhere off in the distance they could hear an ambulance siren. Old Mr. Genner came to the front door and stared down at the body. "I guess you fellas knew what you were doing after all," he said, and went back inside.

When the photographers finished their work Fletcher took the pistol and headed downtown for a ballistics check. Meanwhile, Leopold was going through the dead man's pockets while Connie examined the car he'd come in. "It's rented," she reported. "Nothing of his in it. He was ready to ditch it if necessary."

Leopold took a folded piece of paper from the dead man's wallet and held it to the light. On it was written, *Genner, 143 Magnolia,* with the underlined notation, *Before Monday!*

He carefully refolded the paper and put it in his pocket. Then he walked out to the street and stood for a time gazing at the empty house where Judy Thomas and Carl Forrester had died. The flashing red lights of the ambulance bathed it in an unnatural glow, and it seemed that the house itself was bleeding. He sighed and walked back to where Max Swann stood with Connie.

"Let's go for a stroll around the block," he suggested to the Justice Department man. "We'll be back in a few minutes, Connie."

"How will this be handled?" Swann asked as they walked. "Do shootings like this automatically go before the grand jury?"

"Oh, yes—you'll have to testify."

"Damned nuisance. It'll mean another trip up from New York."

"Perhaps we can arrange for you to stay here," Leopold suggested.

"What?"

"I've been something of a fool, Swann. I caused that man's death, and though he's no great loss to the community it bothers me."

They rounded the first corner and started down the side street. "That day in my office, you mentioned that Thomas and Forrester were killed with a small-caliber pistol. We purposely kept that fact out of the papers. The only one who could have told you that was the killer himself."

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"Now look here—"

"Carl and Judy used only a post-office box number for their kit business. Swann, only you could have given out her new name *and her address.*"

The man beside him said nothing and Leopold slipped a hand into his pocket, taking out the piece of paper he'd found in Perez's wallet. "See what this says? Genner's name and address, and the notation, *Before Monday!* Genner's only connection with Monday was in the conversation you and I had on the phone the other day, when you suggested I wait till Monday before pulling off the guards at Genner's home. Of course that's not what you told Perez. He probably thought Genner was going to be shown some photographs of him on Monday, and he walked into the trap you laid for him."

"He was going to shoot you!" Swann insisted.

"Maybe, maybe not. You killed him before we found out what he was going to do. With Judy and Carl dead you couldn't take a chance on Perez telling someone you'd tipped him off to her location. So you lured him up here to his death."

"Is that what you're going to tell the grand jury?"

"Yes," Leopold replied. "Now suppose you tell me why you did it."

They rounded the second corner, passing under a streetlight. There was no excitement here, a block from Magnolia. Most houses were dark, except for the blue flicker of television sets. After a time Max Swann said, "I guess I loved her. That was my big mistake, thinking someone like Sylvia—like Judy—could ever be faithful to a man. She betrayed Earl Perez on the witness stand, and she betrayed me in Carl Forrester's bed. I came up here to see her and found out she was living with him. Even worse than that, I watched through a basement window and discovered they were packaging ether kits!

"This was the girl I had loved, the girl I'd started on a whole new life! Can you understand that?"

"I think I can," Leopold said quietly.

"God, I even left my wife for her."

They rounded the third corner and Leopold said, "What did you do about it?"

"Brooded. After I saw her up here, saw what she'd become, I thought about it for weeks. Finally I decided she didn't deserve the new life I'd arranged for her. So I put her back in the old life. I phoned Earl Perez's brother and told him where she was."

"Did you know he'd kill them both?"

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"I didn't care. Forrester was just unlucky. But later I figured if Perez wouldn't let that witness live he wouldn't let the neighbor live either. I needed Perez dead, so I'd be safe myself."

They walked along in silence for a time, and then they were back on Magnolia Street. The ambulance was gone, and some of the police cars. Connie Trent was standing on the sidewalk waiting for them. "Weren't you afraid I might kill you?" Max Swann asked Leopold.

"Of course not," Leopold answered. "We're on the same side of the law, aren't we?"

"Where have you two been?" Connie asked.

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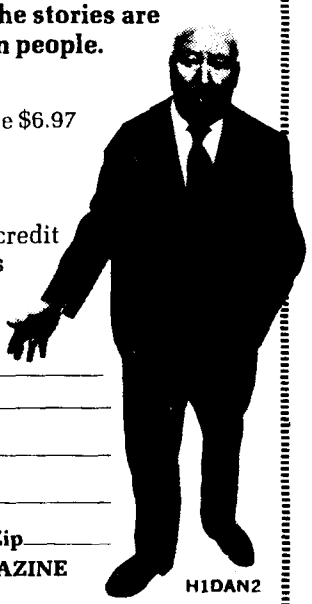

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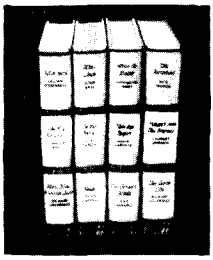

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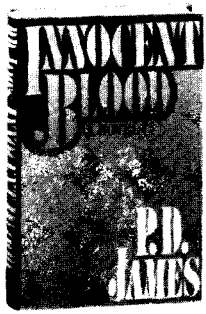

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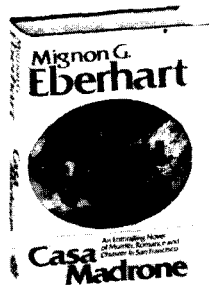

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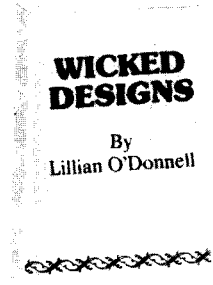

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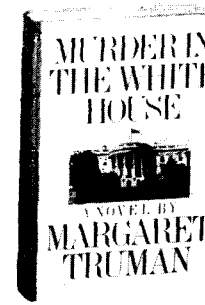

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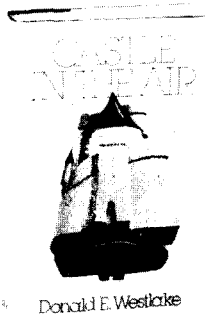

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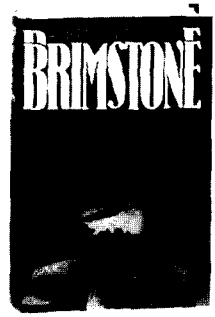

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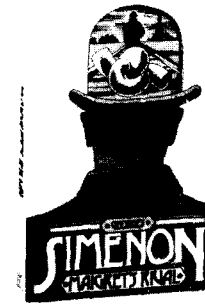

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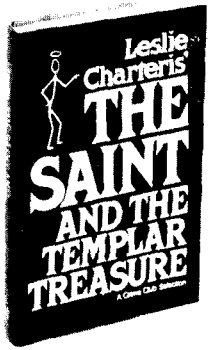

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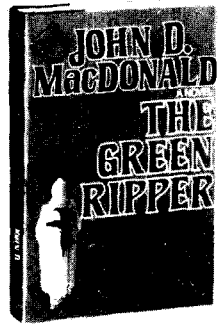

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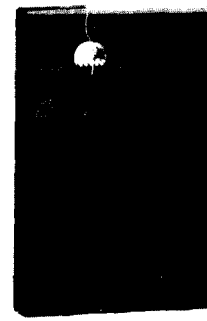

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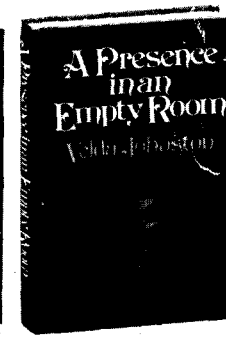

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